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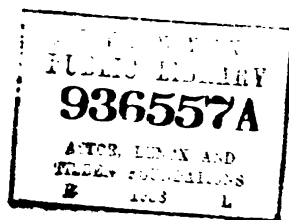
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CHAPTER I.



ENGLAND is not, even yet, the land of music; and, twelve or fifteen years ago, it was less harmoniously inclined than at present. It is not likely that our streets will ever resound with Mozart's choruses, nor will guitars thrill nightly beneath our windows; damp roads forbid such romantic lingering, and fogs threaten the open mouths, so essential to vocal display. And yet, as genius is of no time and no country, — as Scotland has produced its Wilkie, and Norway the world-honored chisel of Thorwaldsen, — so you meet sometimes, even in England, with an intense veneration for art and a devotion to its highest principles that could never be surpassed in the sunniest land of song.

Mr. Winter, the organist of Great St. Benedict's in the quiet country town of Bradford, is the best illustration I have ever known of these remarks. He is a devoted enthusiast on the subject of his beloved art. He says, from his heart, it is angels' work on earth; and he thinks that those persons who leave that work undone, or unattempted, are behaving in a very sad manner; and he only hopes, with all his charity, that it will not be the worse for them by and by. He teaches a great deal, and so do his two sons and his two

daughters, — all industrious, clever, excellent, people ; but each of them immeasurably below their father in exquisite perceptions and gentle bearing.

He or his children teach nearly all the first families within reach of Bradford. He goes to some, and some come to him. These proud, rich people sometimes do what seem to humble, poor people rather mean things. Some of them will send their daughters eight or ten miles to Mr. Winter's house, in Bradford ; and he has formed a weekly class, that he may receive and advance all his pupils at the same time.

Mr. Winter has just descended into the music-room, which occupies the whole of the first floor front of his large, old-fashioned house in Prior Street. He is dressed, to receive his class, entirely in black, and is remarkable for the spotless delicacy of his linen. He is tall, thin, and gray-haired, — over-endowed with sensibilities ; but, as is usually the case, extremely calm in his demeanor. He diffuses an old-fashioned perfume of lavender from his dress ; he uses lavender-water on his handkerchief ; his features are high, his eyes mild and dark ; there is something gentle, soothing, elegant, in all he says and does.

He pauses before one of the grand pianos, and runs his thin, artist's fingers along the keys, then steers between a harp and a violoncello in the direction of his beloved and peculiar instrument, the organ, which stands enthroned on a raised dais at the head of the room.

He opens the folding-doors of that shrine of harmony ; his hand shifts delicately from stop to stop, drawing out, putting back, combining the rich effects of which that peerless instrument is so prodigal. His blower has not yet arrived. He affixes the iron pedal to the side, and, as he works it, keeps his watchful eye on the fast-descending telltale, then crushes into one of Haydn's most impressive movements, the " *Et incarnatus* " of his Imperial Mass.

"Let me blow for you, Mr. Winter," says a gentle voice at his side.

Mr. Winter is much a gentleman, but more a musician. He will not fracture his ears by taking a chord off sharply from his beloved instrument. He lets the notes linger off one by one, till the deepest bass G alone booms and trembles along the floor, and then he rises with the air of a courtier.

A slender girl of fifteen is standing behind him, — his favorite pupil, Regina Howard.

She is one of those creatures, beautiful as a dream, whom hardly anybody admires. Standing now with her back to the light, her face has the dim radiance of a ground-glass lamp; her sharply-cut features are illuminated by dark gray eyes, shadowed beneath long, curved lashes as black as ink; and her dark brown hair is plaited into a long tress that encircles her head like a crown.

"My dear Miss Howard, I beg you ten thousand pardons," says Mr. Winter, as they shake hands. "I hope you have not been standing here long."

"Not half long enough; for I did not hear you begin that movement. Now I will blow, and you will be so very good as to play it for me over again, and, afterward, the same subject from Mozart's Twelfth Mass. I hardly know which I like the best."

"My dear lady, I cannot bear to see you blow; it is too fatiguing."

"I am quite strong enough. I have done it before, when Miss Charlotte has played, and it sets your foot at liberty for the pedals."

The old man cannot resist this plea; he drops his foot on a deep-sounding pedal; his long, thin fingers creep like spiders among the keys; Regina listens devoutly.

It is not a long movement; but, while Mr. Winter plays it, Regina's little history can be easily told.

Five-and-thirty years ago, — long before Mr. Winter lived

in the great house in Prior Street, when he was struggling for a living, teaching the violin in a little, obscure tenement, quite at the back of the town,—his wife suggested that they should let lodgings to eke out their humble means. She was, in almost every respect, the direct opposite of her artist husband,—a strong, stout body, who baked and brewed and starched and ironed and took the exclusive management of the material in their household, that he might be at full liberty to pursue the ideal. What a character she was! What a gossip, what a housewife, what an overflowing, open-handed, passionate, reality! Well, she let her lodgings to a Frenchman, a M. de Laval, and his daughter. The great revolution had ruined them as well as their neighbors.

Mademoiselle de Laval endeavored to support her father by giving lessons in French. She was fortunate enough to obtain pupils, and they managed to live upon her scanty profits. Now the Winters, unlike each other in most things, had one point of resemblance in common,—their kindness of heart.

Mr. Winter would deny himself his violoncello, if he thought its incessant groans were likely to distract the beautiful Regina de Laval and her ailing father. He would much rather have denied himself his cup of tea, truly as he loved that simple refreshment. As for Mrs. Winter, she lived in a perpetual fret, lest her lodgers were stinted in their meals. As she then kept no servant, the *cuisine* of her lodgers fell into her hands. She strengthened their pottages, she added eggs to their omelets, she had recourse to a hundred little harmless falsehoods to eke out the duration of their slender household stores. She hardly knew whether to rejoice or to mourn when her liberal cares were brought to a happy conclusion by the marriage of Mademoiselle de Laval with Mr. Arnold, the rector of Holmwood, a lovely village about two miles from Bradford. The acquaintance between the two families was never suffered to die away. During the old Count de Laval's lifetime, it was his daily habit to drive

into Bradford, and to enjoy a few minutes' gossip with the Winters. And Mr. Arnold, rich and well-connected, was enabled to introduce Mr. Winter to a large circle of private pupils, and to obtain for him the pride and glory of his life, the organ of Great St. Benedict's.

Mrs. Arnold had now been for some years a widow. Her daughter, the mother of Regina, had died of consumption about two years after her marriage with her father's curate. Mr. Howard did not long survive her, leaving his little girl to the sole care of her grandmother. He was distantly connected with one of our high families, — far too distantly to make it probable they would ever trouble themselves about an obscure descendant buried in a country parsonage.

Mr. Arnold's wealth was principally derived from his living; but he was enabled to bequeath to his widow an income of four hundred a year. It was not from meanness that she sent Regina to the class, instead of requiring the services of Mr. Winter at Holmwood. As her grand-daughter had no companions at home, she wished her to have the advantage of meeting girls of her own age occasionally, and comparing her progress with theirs. But the class was not productive of all the pleasures she intended. Regina never told her grandmamma that the girls herded together, and made a party against her; but so it was. She was better born, and infinitely better taught, than any of them; but they never received her on a footing of intimacy. She was not rich enough to command their civility, she would not stoop to beg for it, and they were bitterly jealous of her qualities, — of her rich soprano voice that Mr. Winter said would make her fortune in public, — of her long profusion of shining hair, her inheritance from her foreign ancestry, — of her perfect French accent, which they in vain attempted to imitate, — of her graceful demeanor, even when wearing the white striped shawl which they well remembered for three successive springs; above all, of that tranquil and silent pride which

foiled their petty, vulgar sarcasms. She made them look foolish when they wanted to be clever and ill-natured. It was with some regret, therefore, that she heard footsteps approaching the door, as Mr. Winter brought his last movement to a close.

The two Misses Chillingworth, large, handsome girls, very stiff in all their gestures, now entered, accompanied by the three Misses Ramsay, who were singularly plain and rough in person. The Chillingworths were a great county family, excessively and stupidly proud; the Ramsays very rich and vulgar, and humbly delighted with any notice the Chillingworths might please to bestow. Then came a Miss Brown, hard-working, but without an ear; a Miss Field, clever and careless; and a Miss Clark, who hated the sight of a piano, and regularly set herself against her lesson as a child sets itself against its spoonful of brimstone and treacle.

On this day, as soon as the regular lessons had been gone through, a very important affair was to be discussed, — the programme of an annual concert, given by Mr. Winter to the friends of his pupils, in which the said pupils and his own family were the sole performers. This was not so easily arranged. It was natural that Mr. Winter should desire to make Regina — his favorite pupil and infinitely the best player in the class — a prominent performer on the occasion. It was quite as natural that the Misses Chillingworth should repel the very idea of playing second to Miss Howard, either in a song or concerts. The Ramsays imitated the Chillingworths, and scorned the thought of uplifting their voices in harmony with the poor Regina.

“They could not sing seconds, and their mamma did not like them to play duets.”

Regina drew Mr. Winter a little on one side.

“Put me entirely out of the question, until you have settled what all these ladies are to do, and then you will find it very easy to come to a decision. You know before-

hand that *I* will sing or play whatever you please to give me."

Mr. Winter had the good sense to act upon this advice, though at some expense to his feelings. He turned to Miss Chillingworth with all his usual deference of manner:—

"You have told us, dear lady, what you will *not* do," he said; "perhaps you will now tell us what you *will* do."

Miss Chillingwood suspected a little touch of irony in the remark. She looked annoyed, almost ashamed for a minute, and then selected two or three of her most difficult studies, — things that had been given her to practise, without the least probability of her ever being able to master them. Mr. Winter let her do as she pleased.

The Ramsays, with a shade more of timidity in their composition, were willing to take what Mr. Winter had chosen for them. Regina was to play one of Haydn's symphonies, accompanied by Mr. Winter and his son, Mr. Richard. Miss Chillingworth declined being accompanied. "It made her nervous." Indeed there was a standing joke between her, and Julia Ramsay on the subject of Mr. Richard, who was very ugly, with an impossible nose, and whom she suspected, very unjustly, of being hopelessly attached to her.

The Winters were so much respected that it was not at all uncommon for the parents to take a cup of tea with them at five o'clock, when they called to fetch away their daughters.

In the low, old-fashioned parlor on the ground floor, Mrs. Winter fills a copious arm-chair at the head of her well-spread table; and Mrs. Chillingworth, seated beside her, is sipping a cup of coffee, whose fragrance scents the whole room; Mr. Richard is carving a fowl; Miss Charlotte is making all haste, for she has a class in the church at six; while Miss Winter, who loves talking better than eating, — though she has a class at six, too, — is holding forth upon some of her mother's good deeds. Mr. Winter pushes open

the door, and ushers in his class ; for the young ladies have been singing, and they always take a cup of Mrs. Winter's exquisite tea before they put on their bonnets.

Mrs. Chillingworth is a very wide, flat-looking woman, with wild eyes ; she accepts Regina's bow, and then, as a second thought, holds out her hand. The Ramsays greet her with ecstasy ; and all take their places at the table.

Mr. Richard, though tall and awkward and ugly, has a touch of his father's sensibility to beauty ; he cannot take his eyes off Regina, and he does not try to do so. He is certainly rather familiar in his manner, — not by any means the familiarity of a shopman, but rather the whimsical bluntness of a rough original. Miss Chillingworth is always standing on the defensive when he approaches her, and fancying that his feelings will make him encroaching.

"Well, ma'am, am I to have the pleasure of appearing with you on the 20th ?" he asks jocularly.

Miss Chillingworth stirs her tea, and becomes inarticulate.

"Don't faint, or anything of that sort, pray," he continued audaciously, "as poor Miss Price did the night of her *début*. You remember, father, — she had to play that nice little rondo by Kalkbrenner ; and when she was led to the piano, dear me, we had such a scene. The poor thing turned as white as a sheet. I believe it ended in a fit of tears though !"

Miss Chillingworth swells with indignation.

Miss Ramsay whispers to her, "Poor man !"

"I will promise you, Mr. Richard," cried Regina, "not to use my eyes for garden water-pots on this occasion. I shall trust entirely to you and Mr. Winter to conceal my blunders from the public."

The genteel part of the company looked extremely disgusted at the expression Regina has used ; they don't happen to remember the "gray discrowned head" from whence it came. Mr. Richard, who does, brightens up : —

"I am to play with you? Come, I'm glad of that; I know you keep your time."

Miss Winter goes on steadily through all the talking, telling Mrs. Chillingworth what it is evident she does not care to hear.

"So, Mrs. Chillingworth, yesterday being my mother's birthday, she sent out sixty-nine dinners to as many poor families; baked plum-pudding and excellent roast beef, together with a quart of strong ale, — as she always does on that anniversary; last year, of course, the number of dinners was sixty-eight."

"And next time, Sarah, please God, it will be seventy," said Mrs. Winter with a satisfied look, folding her fat hands in front of her.

"I am quite surprised to hear that there are sixty-nine poor families in Bradford," remarked Mrs. Chillingworth, glaring through her light curls.

"So you gave a grand party, ma'am, last week," said Mrs. Winter.

"A little archery meeting for the young people," replied Mrs. Chillingworth.

"I am sure," cried one of the Ramsays, "I never saw anything so beautiful in my life!"

"It was indeed a brilliant affair," whispered Julia, "and quite a day of triumphs to you, dear Louisa!"

"Oh, don't talk of me!" cried Miss Chillingworth, "after Lady Oswestry. Is not she a splendid creature?"

"Oh, yes! and how beautifully dressed!"

"Did you see Lord Oswestry?"

"You naughty Louisa, I think I did, indeed; and I saw, too, how somebody was flirting with him."

Regina's color mounted a little. Almost everybody she knew had been asked to this archery, except herself; and Mrs. Chillingworth was related to her family, that lady's mother having been first cousin to the late Mr. Arnold; she

hardly knew why she should have been so carefully left out of this party. And it was the more provoking as she had never seen an archery meeting, and had a great curiosity about it; and, still greater than her longing for bows and targets was her desire to see the beautiful Lady Oswestry, of whom she remembered, when a little girl, to have heard her grandfather speak, "as the beautiful Lady Violet Montessor;" and the Oswestrys were so very seldom seen in that part of the country, — they had lived abroad almost entirely since their marriage, — she might never have such an opportunity again, and she had a poet's love for living beauty. And she remembered, too, that the late Lord Oswestry had been her grandfather's intimate friend, and had presented him to the living of Holmwood. She felt almost as if there was some connection between her and the Oswestrys, and thought it a great shame that she alone, of all the neighborhood, should have been denied the opportunity of seeing them.

She could not help listening, through all that Mr. Richard was telling her about the clock symphony which she was learning for the concert, to all the scraps that met her ear about these Oswestrys. She found that they declared they had never seen a prettier fête, — that they were quite sorry they were going down the Rhine, they would so like to have made riding parties with the Chillingworths. She likewise heard every inch of Lady Oswestry's dress enumerated, together with the braided tunic of the little Lord Exmoor, and the delicate muslin frock of Lady Violet. After a whole litany of interjections upon the beauty of these fabrics, she was startled by hearing Julia Ramsay say, —

"But, my dear Louisa, did you *ever* in your life see anything so absurd as Winny Hopper looked, with that short gown of hers, and her bonnet tilted over her nose?"

"Poor old thing!" rejoined Miss Chillingworth.

"It is very strange that elderly females will come to those

places, especially if they don't know how to dress," cried Julia.

"Which they never do," added her friend.

"Miss Hopper!" exclaimed Regina.

"Yes, — your *friend*, Miss Hopper," remarked Miss Chillingworth, with something of a malicious accent in her voice. "You should give her a hint, my dear, to leave off some of those singular odds and ends with which she astonishes our weak minds when she is in full toilet."

"If she were my friend, perhaps I might," said Regina, steadily; "but I thought, though I know but little of her, that she did not go out to gay parties."

"Oh! but you know she has left off being pious," cried Miss Ramsay. "She was at Mrs. Lee's ball in the winter."

"Yes; and, though she did not dance herself, she sat smiling while we all galopaded over her feet," added Miss Chillingworth.

"She is a mystery to me," said Regina, quietly.

"I suppose you know she is trying her very hardest to become Mrs. Morley, your rector's wife?" said Sophia, Miss Chillingworth's quiet sister.

"At her age, too!" exclaimed Julia Ramsay; "isn't it disgusting?"

"She has worked him a pair of slippers, with a cross on the toes, to my certain knowledge," laughed Eliza.

Mrs. Chillingworth seemed to catch some fragments of this discourse, for she turned to Regina, and glaring, as she always did whenever she addressed any one, she said, —

"I did not ask you, my dear, because I know Mrs. Arnold does not like these gay parties; and really we never have any quiet little affairs such as she would enjoy."

Regina smiled and bowed; for she did not know what other reply to make.

And now they were all going away. Mrs. Chillingworth's great carriage rolled to the door. The Ramsays'

greater footman arrived to walk home behind them ; and Regina's humble Becky, amid the sneers of her companions, gathered her young lady's music under one arm, while she poised on the other a wicker basket, in which she had just deposited some needful household purchases.

CHAPTER II.



It is a bright, still June evening. The hedges are gay with dog-roses, and the air sweet with honeysuckles and new-mown grass. The mighty oaks on Holmwood common turn into gold, as the sun sinks behind their wide branches. The stillness deepens ; all the tints in the distant country assume a softer hue ; now a bird on the wing flutters past to a bush, now a lark rushes down to his nest in the heather. A little old lady, all in fresh black silk and white lawn, is seen winding her way among the tall ferns. She is the prettiest old woman in the world, — delicately fair, with a little bloom, like rouge, just on the turn of the cheek, and blue eyes as bright and searching as a child's. The old lady stops, and shades her eyes with her hand ; for there is that quiver in the atmosphere which belongs to the misty summer heat. She walks a little farther, and stops again ; a thrush is singing, and, until the bird finishes his strain without the delicious gurgle, she thinks it is the note of the nightingale. At last she sees, all among the golden broom, the slight, elastic figure of a young girl, bearing a handful of wild flowers, hastening toward her. It is Regina, followed close by the substantial form of Becky Halliday.

“My Regina, has all gone well with you to day?”

"Oh, yes! Mr. Winter is always contented with me; but, granny, do you know that Miss Hopper went to Mrs. Chillingworth's archery fête?" cried Regina, beginning at once with the subject that filled her mind.

"I did not know it, my dear; but it does not surprise me."

"Grandmamma, Mrs. Chillingworth said that you did not approve of gay parties, and therefore she had not asked me. Is it so?"

"I would have allowed you to go with pleasure, my love, had you been invited."

"I thought, at the time, granny, it was an excuse."

"I dare say Mrs. Chillingworth thought I should object, my dear. Your grandpapa and I never entered into much gayety, — it was not his wish; and a stroll on the common refreshed his mind more than a gay party could have done. He was called what he never ventured to call himself, an Evangelical clergyman, — a class who seem now to be somewhat out of repute. But, to go back to the archery: accept, my dear Regina, whenever they ask you. It is very right that you should see a little of the world."

"But they don't ask me, granny!"

"Why, then, my child, if you are a philosopher," said the old lady, archly, "you will content yourself with staying at home."

Regina had a happy temper that did not long make a grievance of anything. She laughed, and turned the subject.

"Mrs. Winter sends her best duty to you, granny, and begs that you will give me a beefsteak for supper."

Mrs. Arnold joined in the laugh. "And yet you are not so very thin and pale, my child," she said, looking at the beautiful carmine color that exercise had brought into Regina's transparent cheek.

"I look so pitiful beside the great Misses Chillingworth,"

laughed Regina ; " they are so stout and fresh ; but they drink beer, which I don't like."

" Ah ! this time I am not mistaken," said Mrs. Arnold, pausing near a thicket of hawthorns, " that *is* the note of the nightingale."

And they stood still to listen, as if it were a fresh song, a newly discovered bird ; and Becky grounded her basket, and stared at them in wonder, for " she did not see why a little whiffing bit of a bird, which her missis could hear any night, should keep her out in the damp like that."

They were drawing near to a pretty grove of fir-trees which skirted a house situated in the very middle of the common. This secluded dwelling was supposed to be inhabited by an old miser, of fabulous wealth and very retired habits. Others said it belonged to some rich proprietor in the neighboring county who left it to the care of a couple of old servants. At any rate, the grounds were carefully enclosed by a high wall which scarcely allowed the roof and upper windows to be visible. The fir-tree walk was well known to all the nursemaids and children about Holmwood, and had been the favorite resort of Regina at a time when she built houses and made fireplaces among the roots of the old trees. There was a wicket-gate cut in the wall, with a stone step in front, which Regina never could pass without thinking of the Arabian Nights, and the doors in their garden walls.

" I really feel ashamed every time I pass that gate," cried Regina.

" I don't wonder, naughty little thing that you were, my Regina."

" Grandma !"

" What is it, my love ?"

" Some one within the wall echoed my name ;—did not you hear ' Regina ' quite plainly ? The miser must be come back."

"Speak lower, then, my child; don't behave as badly as you did seven years ago."

"There, grandma! I saw a face at the wicket!"

"My dear child, you are quite nervous this evening. There's nothing but the iron grating; look again."

"It was only for the moment; but I'm sure I saw a thin, old face. What is it, I wonder, that I feel sometimes, as if there had been, or would be, a link between me and some people? I have that feeling whenever I hear of the Oswestrys; but what is there in common between me and the old miser?"

"A great deal, I think. He must recollect you as a very saucy little girl," laughed the old lady.

For, seven years ago, when Regina was playing with some other children at the foot of those old firs, it chanced that some of them cast their eyes up to a cherry-tree that stood within the mysterious garden, laden with beautiful waxen fruit.

"If the miser would but give us some cherries!" cried one child.

"You would not dare to knock at the door and ask him?"

"Nor you?"

"Nor Regina?"

"Yes, I would."

"Ah! what would you say?"

"You shall hear," replied the little girl, as she mounted the stone step and knocked at the wicket.

The children gathered around, breathless. A miser, an ogre, a giant, — something quite different from other human beings, — dwelt behind that wall.

"It is of no use, Regina."

"Nobody hears you."

Regina knocked again. There was another pause.

"We must knock three times at all fairy places!" she ex-

claimed, turning to her companions, "and then the giant comes out, and says," —

"What do you want?" asked a voice, as the wicket opened.

Regina almost slipped off the step with surprise; but she answered, boldly, —

"Miser! miser! my name is Regina, and I want some cherries!"

The person at the gate must have been just gathering some, for the edge of the basket was raised to the open wicket, and a shower of pink and white cherries fell at her feet. The wicket closed at the same instant, and she remembered how she stood gazing at it, while the others seized the spoil, and sat feasting in a circle on the ground.

"You were always an odd little thing," said Mrs. Arnold, "and you are just the same now. I don't know what I shall do with you."

"You don't believe in my fancies, grandmamma; and yet I have one at this moment. I feel as if something were going to happen."

"By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes,"

returned Mrs. Arnold, laughing.

"O grandmamma! how *à propos!*" cried Regina; "for there goes Miss Hopper, arm-in-arm with Mr. Brand, the curate."

"My dear Regina," interposed Mrs. Arnold, gently, "I had not the least idea that Miss Hopper was in sight, I am sure."

"Then, why does she shuffle round the corner, with her head down in that way, to avoid you, — you, the best friend she ever had?" cried Regina, glowing with indignation. "Why has she supplanted you at the rectory, at the schools,

— your own schools that you founded, — with your old acquaintances, the Millers? Did not she tell Mrs. Miller that you were a Catholic and had a crucifix in your bedroom? and did not she declare to Mr. Morley that you were a more bitter Huguenot than any of your ancestors; that you had roast beef on a Friday, and would not give her any wool for the church carpet? Has not she set against you almost every family in Holmwood? As for her own church creed, Mr. James Ramsay was not far from the mark when he said she was ‘high, low, Jack, and the game,’ as best suited her purpose.”

“My dear, dear Regina, we know nothing of all this. We ought to judge charitably; and here comes Dame Robins, very opportunely I think, to put an end to your tirade.”

Dame Robins, the hostess of the pretty rustic inn, called the Great Bear, a neat, fresh, middle-aged woman, tripped across the road to meet them.

“Good-evening, Mrs. Robins; do you wish to speak with me?” asked the old lady.

“Why, yes, if you please, I did, Madam Arnold,” said the rosy dame, rubbing up one corner of her snowy apron to assist her speech. “You see to-day is the grand Bradford ploughing-match; and a many of the farmers who come from a distance, they stay the night either here or at the Star at Bradford, and every bed I had was bespoke may be ten days or a fortnight ago. And a Bradford coach just now sets a lady down at my door, — a real lady, in bad health seemingly, and quite worn out with a long journey; and, finding we can’t accommodate her for the night, she wishes to get a lodging in the village rather than go on any farther; but you know, Madam Arnold, lodgings are not plenty with us.”

“They are not indeed, Mrs. Robins. I don’t know really — you say the lady is respectable.”

"I'll warrant that, Madam Arnold ; I see too many of all sorts to make a mistake in that matter."

"Then I will beg the lady to accept a night's lodging at my house ; and Regina, my love, make haste home with Becky, and get all ready for a guest."

The good hostess showed Mrs. Arnold into her little parlor, smelling very vilely of stale tobacco, where a lady was seated in an uneasy wooden chair, from which she half rose in answer to Mrs. Robins' blunt form of introduction.

"I learn, madam, that you are disappointed in obtaining rooms to-night in our little village inn ; may I hope that you will accept from a stranger this trifling accommodation ? Be assured, madam, that, although my hospitality is of the simplest, it is very heartily offered," said Mrs. Arnold with her musical accent, and a charming expression of entreaty in her gesture.

"Dear madam, I hardly know how to be grateful enough for your opportune kindness," returned the lady, rising ; "illness makes one very encroaching. I confess myself exhausted ; and I accept your very obliging proposal as frankly as it is made. I must name myself to you as Mrs. Ward. I am seeking here a very retired and quiet spot for the recovery of my health ; that is my motive for — for leaving town at this season. And I think the first proof I can give of my grateful feelings will be to hurry out of this atmosphere, as disagreeable, I am sure, to you as to myself."

The extreme beauty of the lady, her very graceful deportment, and, above all, that unmistakable air of birth, which did not abound among the fair inhabitants of Holmwood, acted upon Mrs. Arnold like a spell.

"Come, dear madam, I am anxious to possess you," she rejoined in a lively tone. "If you will permit, I will direct that your luggage shall be carried to my house."

This carpet-bag and that dressing-case are all my lug-

gage," said the lady, in a firm tone, and fixing her clear regard upon Mrs. Arnold's face.

"One porter, then, will suffice," returned Mrs. Arnold; "in that way, you will not lose sight of your property, as he shall walk by our side."

A gleam of pleasure lighted up the lady's noble face. She knew the world well enough to feel a glad surprise at meeting with a person who did not measure her respectability by the weight of her worldly goods. It certainly was a desperate action, and one that had results of which Mrs. Arnold little dreamed, to offer a weary woman the shelter of her roof for a whole night, without an exchange of visiting-cards, or even a letter of introduction; the sort of thing that might do very well in Arabia or in the Sandwich Islands, but which made every lady's hair stand on end throughout the adjacent parishes of Holmwood and Dingleby. But what would you have? It was only a Frenchwoman!

Meantime the old lady, always mild and calm, threw open her garden-gate, and begged the stranger to enter.

CHAPTER III.



RS. Arnold's house stood in a small court, shaded by lime-trees planted outside the open paling; it faced the common, which was so enriched with clumps of oak, with hawthorn, broom, and fern, as to resemble a fine extent of park scenery. The street-door opened at once into a hall, paved with small squares of marble, panelled with wood, painted white, with a massive decorated chimney-piece, and a grate composed of two brass andirons. A glass door at the farther

end led into a smaller hall, paved also with little checkered squares of black and white marble, which opened directly into the trim, old-fashioned garden, and which was used as a kind of green-house, to shelter geraniums and other delicate plants through the winter.

To the right of the hall was a comfortable dining-room, with deep, old-fashioned cupboards on each side of the fire-place; a wide, Dutch-looking staircase led up by easy stages to the cheerful drawing-room, where Regina, seated at the tea-table, was impatiently expecting her grandmamma and her guest.

"You are welcome, madam, to my little home," said Mrs. Arnold, as she ushered in the stranger, "and this is my grandchild, Regina."

"Regina!" echoed the lady, in a sweet, languid tone; "my name is Regina, too."

Regina, who had come forward to help the lady to throw aside her walking things, now looked up into the most beautiful face she had ever beheld. It was a perfect oval, with large, deeply-set eyes, and thick, white lids. The features were purely Grecian, and the broad, white forehead was just edged with a line of black hair, drawn quite off under a rich lace cap. Her complexion was brilliant; her soft, rose-tinted cheeks seemed to deepen the dark blue of the eyes and the inky blackness of the long lashes; her teeth were dazzling, and her carefully cut lips red as cornelian.

"What can be more refreshing than tea after a weary journey?" remarked Mrs. Ward, as she raised her cup with a hand white as alabaster.

"I agree with you, though I am a Frenchwoman," replied her hostess. "I prefer tea to coffee at all times."

"You, dear madam, a Frenchwoman? How beautifully you speak our language!"

"It has been the language of all my great joys, my great sorrows; I ought therefore to speak it well," said the old lady, quietly.

"And what a charming retreat! What a dear old-fashioned garden! And this pretty room, so enriched with pictures!" said Mrs. Ward, glancing round at some beautiful small paintings that hung on the walls.

"They are but copies," replied Mrs. Arnold.

"And grandmamma copied them all," cried Regina, "from original pictures in the possession of different friends, — when we *had* friends."

Mrs. Ward looked inquiring.

"While Mr. Arnold lived," explained Mrs. Arnold, with a half smile, "we were at the Rectory, a large house with good grounds, and kept a regular establishment, instead of Becky and Marianne. Mr. Arnold had a wide circle of connections and friends. Without being exactly gay, we received very often; and you can easily imagine, my dear madam, by casting your eyes around you, that all this opulence is at an end, and that we have very naturally dropped out of sight of the neighborhood."

"I can imagine," returned Mrs. Ward, "that it requires a superior mind to estimate Mrs. Arnold's qualities; and that ordinary people might find no especial temptation to seek her society."

"Shall I ask Mrs. Ward if *she* is a Frenchwoman? What she says is too obliging," said Mrs. Arnold, with a graceful bow.

"And do you inherit your grandmamma's talent for painting?" asked Mrs. Ward, turning to Regina.

"I like drawing even better than music," she replied; "but heads are my study; I do not sketch. If you are fond of music, I hope we shall often play and sing together."

"Music is my passion. I shall have plenty of leisure, and I trust our acquaintance is only begun."

"Oh! I hope so; that would be delightful!" cried Regina, eagerly.

"Do you think, Mrs. Arnold, I have any chance of finding a lodging to suit me near this place?" asked Mrs. Ward.

"It strikes me that, at Dykeham farm, they would be glad to let two or three rooms," said Mrs. Arnold. "It is, certainly, buried among woods and fields, completely out of the high-road, or any road, in fact."

"The very thing I wish: I shall not be traced there."

Regina lifted her large, gray eyes with a wondering look.

"My dear little girl," said Mrs. Ward, meeting her eye, "be very careful whom you marry."

Regina answered by a vague glance; the danger was not palpable to her imagination.

Mrs. Arnold, with the Arab feeling of hospitality before alluded to, was anxious not to surprise the secret of her guest, and turned the conversation upon art again.

"You see, Mrs. Ward, by my attempts, that I am an admirer of the Venetian school; perhaps you are a convert to the pre-Raphaelite imitators?"

"No, really; I see but little merit in outrageous postures or ugly faces; nor do I know how nature is imitated by giving to every twig and fold the minuteness they would assume if held close before the eye, to be copied in turn."

The conversation, once engaged in so wide a field as that of art, became still more interesting to the three amateurs.

Ancient and modern painters, schools of color, sketches, engravings, outline illustrations, were in turn discussed. Then the lives of painters; thence to biography; from the lives of poets to their poetry; till at last Mrs. Arnold started up.

"My dear Regina, we are keeping up our guest in the most unconscionable manner with our gossip."

"The time has passed so pleasantly," remarked Mrs. Ward, opening a little watch in her bracelet, "that I could not have believed it was past ten o'clock. But I will not detain

my fair torch-bearer. Good-night, dear madam ; with many thanks."

"O grandmamma, what a dazzling creature!" cried Regina, as she entered the old lady's dressing-room, where she was fidgeting, according to her wont, among the drawers of an Indian cabinet, in which various articles of lace lay perfumed by the sandal-wood ; "I hope you are as much enchanted as I am."

"Indeed, my dear, I have seldom seen any one so prepossessing."

"And I am sure, granny, you will tell me who she is, even if it is to be kept a secret."

"I know no more about her, my love, than you do. It is evident, from something she let fall, that it is her object to live in seclusion, and, therefore, the less we mention her to the neighbors the better, my child ; because, if they make her coming here the general topic of conversation, there is no knowing how far it may spread."

"So I think, grandmamma. If Winny Hooper injures this exquisite creature, I'll — what could I do to punish her? She is impervious ; she has not a nerve in her body ; you cannot shame her, you can't baffle her. If you shut the door in her face, she would cringe through the keyhole."

"Stop, stop, my dear Regina ! I was just thinking about Winny. If she has heard that we have a guest, she is very likely to call to-morrow."

"Very likely, indeed, grandmamma, and, if you chance to be gone to Dykeham farm with Mrs. Ward, as I hope you will, I shall have the pleasure of receiving Miss Hopper."

"Well, go to bed, madcap, and sleep if you can, after this adventure."

"I fear I am not very punctual," said Mrs. Ward, as she entered the breakfast-room the next morning, with a sealed letter in her hand ; "but I was so eager to let my son know

my proceedings, and particularly the kindness I so unexpectedly met with, that, as soon as I awoke, I began to write, and have just completed my letter and my toilet together."

While Mrs. Arnold replied by some old-fashioned and cordial inquiries after her guest's health, sleep, comforts, and so forth, Regina gazed, in the breathless admiration which a girl sometimes feels for a beautiful woman, upon Mrs. Ward's lovely face. It reminded her of the portraits of Mary, Queen of Scots, — a face in which the pure outlines and brilliant colors were subordinate to the exquisite sweetness of expression. Her figure, too, above the common height, and just full enough to round off every movement into perfect grace, resembled equally the mien and stature of that unhappy queen. And Regina began to pour out the tea in a sort of dream, wondering whether Mrs. Ward was married to such a man as Bothwell, and where her little boy lived, — with his cruel father, perhaps, or some relations, who persecuted his mother for some unknown cause.

"My love," said Mrs. Arnold, "just run out into the hall with Mrs. Ward's letter. Field will take it to the post when he comes in from milking. He is our 'odd man,'" she added, turning to her guest; "and I can assure you that he, in his time, plays many parts, from cleaning knives to rearing watermelons."

Regina took the letter, which was legibly addressed to "John Dods, Post Office, Glasgow."

If she dropped it on the table-cloth like a red-hot iron, and took it up again, blushing more crimson than a camelia, her only excuse was, that she had never been so startled by a name.

"I'm so cautious, you see, that I write under cover to a person who will forward my letter," remarked Mrs. Ward, as if she was replying to Regina's thought.

"Oh!" said Regina to herself, as she laid the letter on

the slab in the hall, "how could I accuse that peerless beauty, even for a moment, of being named Mrs. Dods?"

"Then, if you approve, Mrs. Ward," Mrs. Arnold was saying as she came back, "we will walk to Dykeham, as the morning is fine, and see about your lodgings; but I warn you, that, until everything is arranged in them to your satisfaction, I shall detain you here as my prisoner."

"Never was there a more willing prisoner, my dear madam, nor one more grateful," said the lady, pressing Mrs. Arnold's hands in her own. "I will put on my bonnet and join you in a moment. But does not my namesake go with us?"

"I should like nothing better, if I had not a great deal to do at home," exclaimed Regina; "besides, I am left to defend the castle while grandma is out. I expect an attack from Winny Hopper."

"One of your village gossips?" inquired the lady.

"Only a neighbor," interrupted Mrs. Arnold, mildly, "who might be a little curious."

"And if this valiant constable were from home, what would Mrs. Hopper achieve?" asked Mrs. Ward, turning to Regina.

"Miss Hopper," said Regina with emphasis, "would then cross-examine Marianne for half an hour on the name, appearance, state, and retinue of our guest; and she would draw her own conclusions from Marianne's conclusions, and would go with them to Mr. Morley and Mr. Brand (the rector and curate); and then, having rested her suspicions in the bosom of the church, her conscience would be at peace."

"I quite long to see your Miss Hopper," said Mrs. Ward, stroking Regina's polished hair with her snowy fingers. "I have often fancied that the intrigues of a village would be as amusing as those of a court."

"Grandmamma, I see Miss Hopper coming across the common; take your keys and your gloves, and fly!"

"And you, my dear Regina, be civil."

"As an orange, grandmamma — through the glass door! That is right! They are gone — and — I thought so — a ring at the bell. Now for Winny Hopper!"

CHAPTER IV.

ALZAC alone could have done justice to the character of Winny Hopper. I approach with diffidence a subject that ought to have been consigned to his skillful hands. He would have dissected, analyzed, combined all the elements of her disposition; and the truth and minuteness of his painting would have made amends for its want of beauty. I really believe, and I am making a great concession, that Winny wanted to go to heaven by and by, — there was no hurry; but she wanted to have it all her own way upon earth as well. To accomplish this twofold end, she took up the pious line of business. She gave a great deal of her time, and a very little of her money, to the wants of her poorer neighbors; she had been attached in her day to a good many clergymen, and this habit of mind gave her always a friend at headquarters; for clergymen, like other men, have no objection to be adored, although, like other men, they really cannot accept every lady who makes them an offer. Winny made them a good many offers, — with her eyes, be it understood, which for some years had rolled their sugary glances upon her reverend friends in vain.

Winny was the happiest creature on the face of the globe;

and, I am afraid I must add, the meanest ; she was neither sick nor sorry.

When she lost her relations, it was of no consequence ; if they went on badly, she wrapped the cloak of her selfishness more closely round her ; and, so long as they didn't spend her money,— which they would have found it hard to do,— she left it all to Providence, like a pious soul as she was, and took care not to fret. Ten years ago, if you had been called upon to point out the most insignificant being in Holmwood, you would have mentioned Winny ; now she ruled the village, ruled the charities, ruled the clubs and schools ; but she could not rule Mrs. Arnold, and so she hated her instead. She hated Regina, as Mrs. Arnold's grandchild ; she hated the Winters, as her early friends ; she hated even Becky Halliday, Mrs. Arnold's cook and house-keeper ; and Winny was a good hater, if she was good at nothing else.

She had still a deeper reason for the bitter feelings with which she regarded Regina Howard. It was not by any means her fault that she was not Regina's mamma.

During Mr. Arnold's life, while Mrs. Arnold was, as a matter of course, the most highly considered lady in the village, she had no slave so humble as Winny Hopper.

Mrs. Hopper, the widow of an inferior tradesman, a quiet, weak woman, came to settle at Holmwood with her only daughter ; and Mrs. Arnold, finding that the other families rather hung back from visiting a person whom they did not consider as perfectly genteel, took her by the hand, and made her welcome among the exclusives of the village. Winny was then about the age of her own daughter, and she proved herself so humble and eager, so anxious to be employed in the schools, so glad to run of errands (genteel errands, be it understood), that Mrs. Arnold, appreciating so much industry and kindness of heart, rather encouraged an intimacy between Miss Hopper and her own beautiful

daughter. Regina Arnold, perfectly amiable and well-bred, was aware that she could not consistently allow a young lady to teach her class in the Sunday school, and to carry her messages to the Ramsays and the Millers, without treating her in all respects as an equal, — walking with her, lending her books and patterns ; in fact, making a return for her civilities. These were accepted with rapture, and with a gratitude that looked a little servile.

The first thing that disturbed this happy interchange of feeling was an attachment that Miss Hopper was so unlucky as to form to the young curate, Mr. Howard, who, very perversely, was devoted heart and hand to Miss Arnold ; and very much perplexed and annoyed the whole Arnold family were, when, through the medium of her mother, Winny announced to them the state of her feelings. She sighed and wept ; she even had recourse to rhyme, in which she upbraided Miss Arnold with not acting the part of a true friend, and resigning her lover to the one who (she said) loved him best. But this offence she forgave in time, for she had not yet done with the Arnolds ; and perhaps her forgiveness was all the easier, as Mr. Howard was the third clergyman she had loved in vain. But when Mr. Arnold died, and Mrs. Arnold retired to the red brick house on the common, then Winny began to look about her. The new rector was a high churchman, and regarded his low predecessor with Popish bitterness. It followed, then, that he looked with a most suspicious eye upon the relict of the late Mr. Arnold. All that she said and did fell under his ban ; but, unluckily, all that she did not say and did not do proved equally offensive. Winny went over to the enemy at once ; she became his spy and his trumpeter, his almoner, and his maid-of-all-work. He came to Holmwood twice a widower with a family of nine children ; but the living was good ; his two wives had been rich ; and Winny's eyes began to roll again with hope to inspire their dulcet glances.

Now I must confess, as I would not willingly depict a faultless character, that Regina detested Miss Hopper. Not because she had told Mr. Morley that Regina was an unfit companion for his seven daughters, — not because she had told Mr. Brand that Regina had laughed at him, — not because she had made Mrs. Miller believe that Regina was an undutiful child to her grandmother, — not even because she had said, in several places, that Regina was attached to Mr. Richard Winter. These distinct falsehoods Regina would not have been at the trouble to contradict, scarcely to remember; but her constant and vexatious hostility to Mrs. Arnold, — *that* Regina never could forgive! Every little plan of usefulness or of kindness that Mrs. Arnold had set on foot in the village, that Miss Hopper, with Mr. Morley's consent, regularly overturned; and, to heighten the indignity, she always came to inform Mrs. Arnold of these changes, and to descant on Mr. Morley's great skill and wisdom. On these occasions Regina's indignation, when not speechless, was apt to be sarcastic, and it required all Mrs. Arnold's gentleness and tact to keep the peace.

"Grandmamma in, Regina?" squeaked Miss Hopper, shaking hands as she entered.

"No; she is out, walking," returned Regina, bearing, as she best might, the infliction of being called by her name, and giving her hand to a person she disliked.

"I just called in with a message from Mr. Morley," Winny pursued. "He does not approve the hymn-book grandmamma gave to the school children; so she wont be surprised that there is another in use."

"It is some years since grandmamma gave any book to the schools," said Regina, coldly; "and nothing will surprise her that comes from Mr. Morley."

Miss Hopper rolled her eyes as if they went on wires, and, not knowing how to answer, sighed, —

"There is one little point that Mr. Morley thinks odd,

particularly in a *clergyman's* widow," said Winny; "grandmamma gives the almswomen soup every Friday."

"She does," and Regina became still colder.

"Well, Mr. Morley thinks" —

"He thinks" — said Regina, impatiently.

"The church thinks," — added Winny.

Regina's pulse beat faster.

"As Friday is an appointed fast-day" —

"The church thinks, and Mr. Morley thinks, that the *soupe* should be *maigre*!" exclaimed Regina, no longer able to keep silent; "but this is Becky's affair, not ours, Miss Hopper. It is not we who stir the saucepans. Let Mr. Morley condescend to write a receipt for Becky, and let it be signed by all the almswomen; for their consciences ought to be studied, — there was a time, you know, when it looked ugly to fast on Fridays; and let him still further condescend to express his wishes in person, and grandmamma will give him an answer."

Winny rolled her eyes, and said, "For such a young person it did not look well to have any opinions; that the church was our mother."

"I don't profess any opinion whatever about the church," cried Regina. "Clever men are wrangling bitterly enough about church questions without our joining in the quarrel, Miss Hopper; it is not as if other subjects were scarce."

"True!" squeaked Winny; and she had a most unnatural voice, like all false persons. "Who was that lady, Regina, that I saw walking with you and grandmamma on the common yesterday?"

Now Regina knew that when Winny had met them they were alone; but she had heard afterward some rumor about Mrs. Ward, and put her question in that form, like a fox as she was.

"When I saw you, we were walking with Becky," laughed

Regina, "an excellent cook, but no lady, even in these days when ladies are scarce."

"It was not Becky," said Miss Hopper.

"I beg your pardon," insisted Regina; "but, when we saw you walking arm-in-arm with Mr. Brand (Miss Hopper blushed), we were closely followed by Becky, who carried my music-book for me, and no one else."

"Mr. Morley told me this morning" — remarked Miss Hopper.

"Told you that you had seen a lady walking with us?" asked Regina.

"That you had a lady staying with you."

"Indeed!"

"But I suppose he was mistaken" —

"He could not be. Mr. Morley, you know!"

"Well, then, Regina, you *have* a lady guest?"

"But I don't yet understand, Miss Hopper, what Mr. Morley and you have settled about us. Is it that we are to consider Becky a lady, or that it was not Becky, but some unknown person whom you saw with us; or are we suspected of harboring the said unknown person, who is displeasing to the church?"

"I am afraid you are a bad girl, Regina," said Winny, screwing up her eyes with some attempt at jocularitv; "but I suppose there is no *mystery* about this lady?"

"But we have not made out the lady yet, Miss Hopper; and, talking of ladies, is it true that Mr. Morley is going to be married again?"

"No," said Winny, turning scarlet; "where did you hear that? Who is the lady?"

"I heard it at Bradford, — a very pretty young woman, they said, with fifty thousand pounds."

"Do you think it is true?" asked Winny, and one tear began to travel slowly down her cheek.

Now Regina had heard the report at Bradford, and

thought nothing about it, — reports were not scarce in a country town, — but she could not help saying, unmoved by the tear, —

“I dare say it is ; for they mentioned at the same time that the lady was a zealous Puseyite.”

“I don’t know what you mean by Puseyite,” sobbed Winny ; “perhaps you will give me an explanation of the word.”

“I’ll give you Sydney Smith’s explanation of Puseyism willingly,” answered Regina ; “and then, you know, the adjective will be easily understood. ‘A religion of posture and imposture, of circumflection and genuflection, of bowings to the east and courtesying to the west, and such like absurdities.’”¹

“Did you, Regina, hear the lady’s name ?” asked Winny, sobbing.

“A Miss Cutler, whose father is a dealer in hardware, in Prior street. But it was told me at the Winters’ merely as a piece of gossip.”

“Now, I think, Regina, that is not likely,” quoth Winny, after a pause. “Miss Cutler is not high enough for Mr. Morley. I think I need not be afraid ; and I *should* be sorry, on account of dear Annie Morley, who is nearly eighteen now.”

“Miss Morley has seen her mother replaced once ; perhaps it would not be so bad a second time,” said Regina.

“No, as you say !” exclaimed Winny, brightening up ; “but then it ought to be an older person ; Miss Cutler is so very young, not above two or three and twenty ; and as for anybody in trade, you know that is quite out of the question for Mr. Morley.” And Winny’s father had kept a toy-shop ! But that she had long forgotten.

By this time, Regina began to think that their agreeable little conversation had lasted long enough, and to wish very

¹ From a sermon preached by him at St. Paul’s Cathedral.

much that Winny would go. But Miss Hopper was equally determined to stay, hoping that something might turn up to gratify her curiosity; for she had pledged herself to Mr. Morley to bring him some tidings of the mysterious lady.

"Well, Regina, how do you get on with your music?" she asked.

"Very well, thank you. I am very busy, just now, practising for Mr. Winter's concert."

"And how is Mr. Richard?" inquired Winny.

"Very well, and very happy. You will be delighted to hear that he has got the organ of St. Olives, in the new town. His father is so pleased!"

Now Regina knew, that, when Mr. Morley first came to Holmwood, Mrs. Arnold had written to him, warmly requesting that Mr. Richard might be preferred to the post of organist, which then happened to be vacant; but Winny carried the day against Mr. Richard, whom she disliked. She, therefore, turned very yellow on hearing that he was appointed to a better organ, and said, sharply,—

"I never had a good opinion of Mr. Richard."

Regina was about to make a hot reply, and thus confirm forever the idea of her partiality to Mr. Richard, when the door opened, and Mrs. Ward, followed by Mrs. Arnold, walked quietly in.

"O grandmamma," thought Regina, "why could not you have loitered a little on the way?"

Mrs. Arnold addressed Winny; and Mrs. Ward, advancing slowly to Regina, sank into the easy-chair beside her, and opened at once upon the subject of her morning's expedition.

"Well, we have been *so* successful," she began. "Four such nice rooms, large casement windows, a stone staircase, and *such* a dairy! My dear child! But I learn that the farm was built out of the ruins of an old monastery; and

the groined roof of the chapter-house now glooms above the milk-pans."

Regina was in agonies. She well knew that Winny could hear with both ears at once, and that she was at that moment devoting one of those useful implements to Mrs. Arnold, while, with the other, she was gathering up the fragments of Mrs. Ward's description.

"Yes, it is a pleasant walk," she answered; "and the Dykeham woods are all around you; there is a bridle-path all along the hill-top, from which you have such a lovely view of the valley quite as far as Bradford."

"You shall show it me some evening, when you and Mrs. Arnold walk over to taste my strawberries and cream."

"Will you introduce me to your friend, Mrs. Arnold?" asked Miss Hopper in her very highest key.

"Miss Hopper," said Mrs. Arnold, indicating Mrs. Ward by a movement of her hand, instead of mentioning her name.

Mrs. Ward, her beautiful lips trembling with suppressed laughter, bowed in return to Miss Hopper's salutation.

"I did not quite catch the name?" said Miss Hopper.

"If you will take some luncheon with us, I believe we shall find it ready in the dining-room," remarked Mrs. Arnold, rising.

Even Miss Hopper could not persist any longer; she declined the luncheon, and suffered Regina to conduct her downstairs.

CHAPTER V.



RS. Ward spent a week with Mrs. Arnold while her lodgings were preparing. She furnished them herself, and she appeared to have ample means to gratify her taste. She hired a Dingleby girl to wait on her personally, all other offices being undertaken by the old-fashioned farmer's wife. Certain trunks had arrived to her address during the week, containing store of rich clothes, trinkets, books, and objects of *virtù*. Everything she possessed gave the idea that she had been in affluent circumstances; even her dressing-case was splendidly fitted up, and the chased gold tops of the glass bottles within bore the initials R. W. engraved beneath an ancient coat-of-arms. Had Regina been of a prying disposition, she would very soon have come to the bottom of whatever slight mystery might appertain to her friend's situation. For there was a fearless candor about Mrs. Ward, which frequently led her to say things that were anything but prudent, considering that, by her own showing, she was desirous of concealment. Thus she had no scruple in avowing to Regina that she made use of a feigned name.

"You see, I assumed the name of Ward," she remarked one day as they were standing before her toilet-table, "because of my initials, which are marked upon everything I have. Fancy the washerwoman puzzling over my pocket-handkerchiefs, if I had called myself Mrs. Anderson."

Regina laughed, but she was far the more cautious of the two. Her friendship made her vigilant. She was always putting away Mrs. Ward's books, and locking up her toilet bottles; and some very elegant trinkets which her friend had absolutely forced upon her, she put aside, lest they should

be seen by somebody who might be acquainted with Mrs. Ward's history, and willing to do her an injury.

"I believe you suspect Marianne of having graduated under the Garter King-at-Arms!" cried Mrs. Ward one morning, when Regina snatched up an antique casket that held her crochet, and prepared to run out of the room with it on hearing the bell ring.

"No," said Regina, pointing to the brazen lock above which the ancient coat was engraved; "but, if Mr. Brand should come in, you might as well tell him your name at once. He is an excellent herald."

Mr. Brand did come in just as Regina vanished with the casket. He was a pleasant, good-natured, fat young man, with very small features, that scarcely made any show on his portly expanse of face. He was a great favorite with Mrs. Arnold; a little, perhaps, because he presented so strong a contrast to his principal, Mr. Morley; who, dark and gaunt, with a swinging pace, bore a strong analogy to a hungry wolf.

When Regina came back empty-handed, she found them all sitting round the table, laughing heartily at a number of *Punch* which was spread open before them.

"It's very good, *I* think," said Mr. Brand; "but it's not liked at the rectory, and therefore it's not often I get hold of one. Where do you think I picked up this?"

"At the Ramsays', I suppose!" exclaimed Regina, drawing near to look at the sketch of a tall, angular woman in a large bonnet, representing some political character. "Of course you did, though; for some one has written Miss Hopper's name at the bottom, — one of the many Mr. Ramsays, most likely."

"Well," said Mr. Brand, turning round and looking up at Regina, "what will you say to my having found this in Miss Hopper's hands this morning? It had been sent her by

post; and as she was shedding tears over it, I thought the best thing I could do for her was to carry it away."

"And she said, did she not, that I sent it to her?" cried Regina.

"I assure you, Miss Howard," replied Mr. Brand, "that I never believed you capable of it."

"Thank you," said Regina; "it is a little hard that Miss Hopper cannot imagine me to be a gentlewoman, because she is not one herself."

"Regina, Regina!" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold.

"I know these female quarrels must appear very ridiculous to you," pursued Regina, making a little threatening face at her grandmamma; "but I ask you, Mr. Brand, if I am not persecuted? Not an idle boy sends Winny Hopper a valentine but she accuses me. If Mr. Morley wants to see a martyr, let him come here!"

"O Miss Howard!" said Mr. Brand, trying to look grave.

"I like your Mr. Brand," whispered Mrs. Ward. "He did that very well; he saw at a glance, when you first looked at the print, that you had nothing to do with it, and that was all he came for. I'm rather sorry I shall not be his parish-ioner."

"So, Miss Howard, I hear that you are to make a brilliant debüt at this concert," said Mr. Brand; "at least so I learn from Mr. Richard."

"I hope you will be there, Mr. Brand, to encourage me," laughed Regina.

"Certainly I shall. Is it thought proper to applaud the performances, Mrs. Arnold?"

"Oh, no! it is conducted in the most discreet manner; and you, — what progress do you make on the organ?"

"Well, Mr. Richard thinks he shall make something of me; and he is a good master, though an odd man."

"I hear he is not allowed at the rectory," said Regi-

na. "They have Mr. Bradford Winter, with his airs and graces."

"A very nice man!" repeated Mrs. Ward, when Mr. Brand had taken leave. "Whom is he to marry? You know the clergyman of a village is always going to marry somebody."

"Miss Hopper thinks he is going to marry her, — if she cannot get Mr. Morley, that is to say!" exclaimed Regina; "but other people think he is to marry Miss Morley, the eldest girl, who is just out."

"And is Mr. Brand often here?"

"Very often. He and grandmamma are great allies."

"Then poor Miss Morley!"

"Why, Mrs. Ward? I am sure grandmamma would never say a word against her."

"I am sure she would not," said Mrs. Ward, eagerly; "come, let us try a duet together, — 'O lovely Peace!' — we both adore Handel."

It was the evening before Mrs. Ward left them for her home at Dykeham. It happened to be dull and windy; it rained, too, in a drizzling, chilly way. There was a fire lit in the drawing-room; Mrs. Arnold was taking her after-dinner sleep; Mrs. Ward was reclining in one of the comfortable chairs with which the room abounded, and Regina, seated on a stool at her side, was resting her head in her friend's lap, and watching the boughs of the great fir-tree, as they swayed to and fro before the window-panes.

"I love the fir," said Regina; "I am never tired of watching its branches, as they toss and beckon in the wind."

"What conceit is that, pretty one?" asked Mrs. Ward.

"I don't know; when I read Racine to grandmamma as a child, they used to keep time to the stately lines. It seemed that, while I read, they went through the gestures of the parts."

"How lonely I shall feel to-morrow evening!" said Mrs.

Ward, stroking Regina's bright hair. "I shall be thinking of this cheerful room and its kind inmates, and I shall not know how to occupy myself at first. Afterward, I am so used to solitude, that I shall not be at a loss."

Mrs. Ward," said Regina, after a pause, "is your little boy like you?"

Mrs. Ward, suppressing a strong inclination to laugh, replied, "Why, no! I really think not in the least like me."

"Oh, what a pity!" cried Regina.

"But I think nobody so handsome," said Mrs. Ward, laughing. "He is very tall, for his age, and very light; but, that he is so much better looking, he resembles very much a relation of his, Lord Oswestry, whom you may have seen."

"Lord Oswestry! is he related to you?"

"To my son, at least, — not to my family."

"Will your little boy be able to come and see you, Mrs. Ward?"

"Oh, yes. I quite depend on seeing him soon."

"I should think he would be very much amused at the farm, with the cattle and horses, and the harvest that is soon coming on," said Regina.

"Yes, he is reasonably fond of horses," replied Mrs. Ward.

"And how old is he?"

"If I tell you his age," said Mrs. Ward, patting her cheek, "you would think me an old woman."

"Oh, that I could not!" exclaimed Regina, rising and going to the tea-table.

They walked with Mrs. Ward to Dykeham the next day, and yielded to her persuasions to stay and drink tea with her. A warm moonlight evening tempted Mrs. Arnold to linger till nine o'clock; but the walk through the fields was so retired and so short, that they had no fear of returning by themselves, even at that hour. Mrs. Ward was as pleased as a child with exploring the farm in company with Regina.

"I could almost fancy being happy here," said Mrs. Ward to herself, as they stood at the gate looking out on the rich prospect.

"How I wish I could make you so!" exclaimed Regina.

"You do make me happier," replied Mrs. Ward; "I always feel soothed by your presence."

"And, when your little boy comes, you will be so much more cheerful," added Regina. "What delightful walks you will take in the wood! You will not be afraid of gypsies; for even a boy is a protection, you know. His holidays must soon be here now."

"Yes, I hope he will soon have a holiday," returned Mrs. Ward.

"Is he like you in nothing? Is he not fond of music?" asked Regina.

"Oh, yes! passionately fond of music. I never met any one more so."

"You will sing to us before we go?"

"Yes, you shall judge of my new piano."

Mrs. Ward had a beautiful voice, and a far more finished manner than Regina could boast; but she always used to say to her, —

"Your pure cathedral style is all in the right way, my dear. You have nothing to unlearn; and a few lessons would give you the Italian manner, if it is worth having, at any time. But I warn you, that when it is not perfectly caught, it is worse than anything, — more like the noise of a sick cow than any human effort of the lungs. I shall see some of you to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Ward in her coaxing tone, as she parted with her two friends at the gate.

"It is Regina's Bradford day, and I am afraid of her doing anything beyond her lesson; she is not strong, you know," said Mrs. Arnold. "But if you would take your tea with us" —

"With pleasure. I want to hear 'Angels ever bright and fair,' after the next lesson."

Everything went well with Regina at the Winters'; her symphony was already perfect; the two songs entrusted to her were "rendered quite professionally," as Mr. Bradford Winter told her. At her particular request, Mozart's *Et Incarnatus* was included in the programme, and the soprano fell to her share. Mrs. Ward praised and encouraged her, and was never tired of making her rehearse her songs, and teaching her to finish every passage.

They were going over the divine *Et Incarnatus* together that evening, when Mr. Brand came in "promiscuously," as Becky used to say. Mrs. Arnold begged him to take the tenor part, and they went through it very successfully. Mrs. Ward was an excellent musician, and she took up the points of the bass voice so distinctly that the omission of the fourth part was scarcely felt.

"How I wish, Mr. Brand, you were to sing this on the twentieth, instead of Mr. Bradford Winter; he has such a tiny voice, and you are a pupil you know. Why should you not?" cried Regina.

"No, I'm afraid, Miss Howard. It's a very flattering wish on your part, but it would not be liked at the rectory."

"Oh! if Miss Morley objects," laughed Regina.

"No, indeed, Miss Howard; you have quite a wrong idea; I was thinking only of Mr. Morley."

Mr. Brand looked so hot and earnest, that Mrs. Ward turned the subject.

"Suppose we try the *Agnus Dei* from the Fourth Mass," she said, turning over the leaves.

"That is really exquisite," said Mrs. Arnold, as they concluded.

"And it must be fine to charm my Huguenot grand-mamma," exclaimed Regina. "I cannot think what makes me so fond of all Catholic things; certainly it is not a taste

inherited from the Levals, nor from my dear grandfather Arnold ; but *I* like the *genuine article*, Mr. Brand ! ”

“ O Miss Howard, you are too bad ! ” returned the curate ; “ but I hope Mrs. Arnold will persuade you not to turn Papist.”

“ I have no fear of that, Mr. Brand,” said Mrs. Arnold. “ She ventures to be very saucy sometimes, and I know you are good enough not to take offence ; but, really, what are we to say to these great wax candles that Mr. Morley has set upon the communion-table ? ”

Mrs. Arnold looked so anxious that Mr. Brand felt obliged to say something. He seemed rather puzzled.

“ Why, Mrs. Arnold, we may say — a — that — that they are a great expense to the parish.”

Mrs. Ward laughed.

“ I dare say they look very handsome, Mr. Brand. You should employ some of your ladies in painting those pretty emblems which you see affixed to the Catholic tapers. I would volunteer, but I belong to Dingleby where tapers are not encouraged.”

“ If, instead of that, Mrs. Ward, you and Miss Howard will sing me a duet, I will not say that I shall not be more obliged to you.”

Mrs. Ward and Regina readily complied ; but Mr. Brand, with all his love of music, instead of approaching the piano, drew his chair close to Mrs. Arnold, and said in a low tone, —

“ That is a very beautiful creature, and a lady of distinction, to judge by her manners.”

“ So I think,” replied Mrs. Arnold.

“ I thought it better — I called this evening,” said Mr. Brand, with a good deal of hesitation. “ It could do no harm to let you know that Mr. Morley intends calling on you upon this very subject.”

“ You frighten me, Mr. Brand ; what is his object ? ”

"He imagines there is some mystery connected with this lady; and he conceives — I do not defend him — that your intimacy with her is objectionable, if you cannot explain who and what she is, and give a sufficient reason for her being here at Holmwood."

"Really, Mr. Brand, this is a little inquisitorial, is it not? Nobody used to the world can look at that lady and not be convinced that she is respectable; and, beyond that, what right has any one to investigate?"

"I do not advocate it, I assure you, Mrs. Arnold. I merely wished you to be prepared for his visit."

"And I feel your kindness very much, Mr. Brand. By the way, perhaps you will mention that I give my soup on Thursday. In little things I should always wish to comply with his demands, though I could desire that they were not conveyed through the medium of Miss Hopper; but really this invasion of one's house and hearth, — my Huguenot blood begins to rebel!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Ward, while she was playing the symphony, "I do believe it is coming, — the proposal is coming! I don't know whether you are used to the sort of thing; but at any rate you can make up your mind while I am getting through this little bit of solo. Make haste! I am going to begin!"

"Don't, Mrs. Ward; you set me laughing."

"There, you lost your time, silly child! To be sure it is nervous, — these things don't happen every day."

"I think, ladies, you are merrier than we have been," said Mr. Brand, approaching them.

"How's that, Mr. Brand?" asked Mrs. Ward, turning from the piano.

"I am never merry when I hear sweet music," he replied.

"Mr. Brand, I hope you don't forget to-morrow?" cried Regina.

"What to-morrow, Miss Howard?" he asked, half laughing, yet looking as if he perfectly expected an attack.

"The eve of St. Ildefonso! Dear me, what would become of you if I did not remind you of your duties?"

Mr. Brand laughed heartily, and made his adieu to the party.

"He is so good-tempered," remarked Mrs. Arnold.

"I am quite in love with him," said Mrs. Ward.

Regina was shutting up the piano.

"My namesake says nothing," added Mrs. Ward.

"Oh, yes! I am charmed with him, of course," cried Regina, closing the instrument carefully.

"And, my dear madam," asked Mrs. Ward, affecting to whisper, "what does he propose to settle on our little friend? Something handsome, I trust."

"My dear Mrs. Ward, that child!" returned Mrs. Arnold, laughing.

"We are never children in these days; we begin to think about pin-money at five years old," replied Mrs. Ward.

"My opinion," said Regina, "is, that though somebody is very witty and very gay, she is likewise very tired, and ought not to sit up any longer."

"The child is right," returned Mrs. Ward; "pleasure fatigues me, pain exhausts me, but my spirits run away with me sometimes. My spirits! I do believe there are some things you cannot destroy!"

"O grandmamma!" cried Regina, as she was putting on her friend's shawl, "I do believe I saw the miser on the common, as I was returning from Bradford with Becky, — such a thin, gray old man! He followed us close for a long way; once I thought he seemed listening to what we were saying."

"Who is the miser?" asked Mrs. Ward, sitting down again.

"An old man, supposed to live in that house on the common; they say his name is Baker."

"Baker!" repeated Mrs. Ward, and she sat thinking for some moments.

"Is he a gentleman, your miser?" she asked, after a pause.

"He is a very shabby, poor-looking old man," said Regina; "but when people are old, I think they are seldom vulgar: white hairs ennoble."

"She is odd, Mrs. Arnold," exclaimed Mrs. Ward, rising. "Well, Regina, I expect my little boy from day to day; you must help me to amuse him."

"That I will!" she cried; "but I know so few games, having no brothers; and, though there are some ninepins in the summer-house, half of them are lost."

"What a pity!" returned Mrs. Ward. "Good-night, dear Mrs. Arnold."

CHAPTER VI.



R. MORLEY did not fail to pay his promised visit on the morrow. Regina took care to be in the drawing-room, while her grandmamma received him below.

He came in, gaunt as usual, his black hair in disorder, his teeth projecting, his surly eyes set close together, and a drop in one eyelid, which is ever to be shunned.

"Be seated, Mr. Morley," said the old lady, half rising, the coy perfume of violets diffusing itself from every fold of her spotless dress as she moved.

"Oh, I called to inquire about the lady you have with you," said Mr. Morley, laying his hat on the ground before him.

"That lady is no longer in my house; she has taken lodgings in the parish of Dingleby," replied Mrs. Arnold.

"In that case, and if your acquaintance with her *has* wholly ceased" —

"Far from it, Mr. Morley; I am just beginning to know her."

"What's her name, ma'am?"

"Ward."

"You *know* that to be her name?"

"That is the name by which she is known to me."

"Brand says she is a woman of quality."

"She seemed to strike Mr. Brand as such; but I need not remind Mr. Morley that in England, where the birth is gentle, a title does not add anything but precedence to the estimation in which a lady is held."

Mr. Morley never thought any remark a woman made worth a direct answer; he went on with his cross (very cross) examination.

"Well, but what is she? Is she a widow?"

"I never took the liberty of asking her that question."

"It is your duty, then, Mrs. Arnold! Here is your granddaughter associating with — you don't know whom! a young person, I must add, the last in the world to be allowed to run loose with any chance acquaintance."

"Mr. Morley, I am as solicitous for my grandchild's welfare as you can be; but all our ideas of duty seem to me so opposite, that I think they will be only strengthened on either side by discussion."

"*Your* ideas, ma'am? What can they possibly be when compared with *mine*? Am not I a priest?"

Mrs. Arnold might have replied, had she spoken her thoughts, "By no manner of means. No sacrifice, no

priest!" But she merely answered with that "*fin sourire*" for which we have no equivalent term: "If, Mr. Morley, the clergy are infallible, I claim that right for your predecessor. Mr. Arnold gave me almost all the ideas I possess."

No doubt Mr. Morley had a crushing argument in reserve, if he had chosen to employ it; but as he adhered to his rule of neglecting all her replies, leaving them quite out of the conversation, as it were, he went on improving his hearer to this effect:—

"Well, ma'am, I take leave to tell you that all this looks very suspicious. Here's a woman, who does not proclaim herself a widow, living without her husband; no possible treatment can justify her escaping from his control,"—

"How if he attempted her life, Mr. Morley?" asked Mrs. Arnold, meekly.

"That would have nothing to do with it. Beside, what do you call attempting her life? How do you know he attempted it? As long as she is not dead, it is a proof, I suppose, that she is living."

Mrs. Arnold did not deny it.

"And, I must tell you that a lady of great good sense, Miss Hopper, who met her here, mentioned her to me as a very flighty sort of person."

Again the spiritual smile. Unfortunately his authority was not a weighty one in that house.

"And, in connection with that subject," he added, taking up his hat, to Mrs. Arnold's great refreshment, "let me advise you to caution Miss Howard to spread no more reports of my matrimonial views. It is not pleasing to me that anything connected with my affairs should be the subject of discussion."

"I must venture to say, in defence of my grand-daughter," remarked Mrs. Arnold, "that if she confided any current report to a lady of Miss Hopper's sense and discretion, it was

the farthest from her thought that it would be carried round to the only person it was likely to annoy."

The irony of the defence escaped him, but not the boldness of making any defence at all. He rose with a sullen nod, meant to acknowledge Mrs. Arnold's graceful courtesy, and stalked out of the room.

"O my little Regina! what have you been doing?" cried Mrs. Arnold, when her grandchild, swift and light as a bird, darted into the room, which Mr. Morley had just lightened of his presence; "what is this report you have spread about our rector?"

"Why, granny, I merely told Winny a piece of Bradford gossip about him and Miss Cutler, to divert her from her kind inquiries after Mrs. Ward, and here she has carried it straight to Mr. Morley! Delicate! I suppose you can see now what a well-wisher she is to both of us!"

"She cannot wish, my dear, to injure us; we have never done her anything but good."

"*You* have not, granny! But even Winny must see that *I* despise her, and that is not to be forgiven."

"Miss Hopper is not judicious," began Mrs. Arnold.

"Now, granny, I think her the most judicious woman that ever lived. She is a female Vicar of Bray; she knows how to get good things from everybody, though how she manages to secure Mr. Morley's patronage and Mr. Miller's favor at the same time, is a mystery to me; I'll ask her some day for the receipt."

"My little Regina will do nothing that she knows will vex her grandmamma. Is the fly come already? I have so much shopping to do at Bradford that you will not see me here much before one o'clock, but you will be so engrossed with your music that you will not miss me."

"My love to Mr. and Mrs. Winter, granny," said Regina, as she attended Mrs. Arnold to the door of the fly; "and

don't forget my compliments to Mr. Richard ; I quite dote on him ever since " —

This singular declaration was cut short by the approach of Winny herself, picking her way along the path, just wetted by a summer shower, and working her eyes from side to side, while her head remained perfectly straight.

Mrs. Arnold shook her head at Regina from the window, and the fly drove off.

"Grandmamma going to Bradford, Regina?" squeaked Winny.

"*Gone*, Miss Hopper," said Regina with a formal bow.

"Mr. Morley has been here this morning?"

"Yes, *thank you*, Miss Hopper." Giving "thank you" all the emphasis of "thanks to you."

"Seen Mrs. Ward lately?" — her voice mounting at every question, till it seemed impossible that she could squeak more sharply.

"We have seen her every day since she came, and we fully intend and hope to continue that pleasure."

"Who is she, Regina?"

"Mrs. Ward, of the parish of Dingleby, in the county of Buckinghamshire."

And, Regina's irritation having now reached its height, she saluted Miss Hopper hastily, lest worse should come, and ran into the house.

Miss Hopper proceeded leisurely on her way ; for she was thinking whether she should first tell Mr. Morley or Mr. Brand that she had heard Regina say she doted on Mr. Richard.

In another minute the lovely notes of Schubert's "*Horch horch die Lerch*" rang through the room.

Becky — plain creature though she was — loved Regina's singing ; and having laid the luncheon ready for Marianne, and prepared the chicken and the gooseberry tart for dinner, she deemed herself at liberty to seat herself on the four little

steps which led from the landing to the drawing-room door and, as she phrased it, to "have a bit of music."

While she was thus enjoying herself, with her arms rolled up in her apron, Marianne approached, and in a cautious whisper informed her that there was a gentleman wished to speak to Miss Regina.

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Becky, looking very pugnacious; "what gentleman? And missus out! I dare say it is somebody come after the plate."

"No, it's not!" persisted Marianne, forcing her way to the drawing-room door. "Miss 'Jina, a gentleman downstairs particularly wishes to speak to you for a moment."

"Beg him to walk up," said Regina, discontentedly leaving the piano, and running over in her mind the very few gentlemen with whom she was on speaking terms.

"Surely it's not Mr. Morley come back again?" she thought, as she took her seat. "No, hardly; and Mr. Brand was here last night; and the Ramsays are in town; and the Chillingworths don't know me to speak to; and young Miller is in Africa, and very foolish I think in his father to let him go; the miser, perhaps" —

But the tall, grave young man who now stood in the doorway was of a very different class from the generality of the Holmwood beaux. He had that air which later in life she learned to define as belonging exclusively to persons of condition, whose habits and acquirements did not disgrace their birth; but she was now only sensible of something reserved and calm, that threw her to a distance, and made her feel almost for the first time in her life thoroughly shy.

"I must apologize for disturbing you, Miss Arnold," he said; "but I understand it is through you that I am to be made acquainted with Mrs. Ward's place of residence. As Mrs. Arnold is from home, perhaps you will have the goodness to direct me to her house."

"If you would not mind waiting till grandmamma re-

turns," said Regina, hesitating; "she is only gone into Bradford, a little way off, for shopping; she will be happy to speak to you. Mrs. Ward, I know, does not wish to receive strangers."

"But Mrs. Ward, I am sure, is very anxious to see me," replied the stranger; "I am her son."

Regina's transparent features expressed the most perfect incredulity at this statement. She looked up at the tall gentleman, who stood with such a polite and frigid air before her. Although his broad forehead and accentuated features might make him look older than he was, yet to suppose him Mrs. Ward's son was too ridiculous. No, this was one of her enemies come in disguise to seek her out. She colored, half frightened, and pointed to a chair, —

"If you would have the goodness to sit down for a little while," she said; "I expect grandmamma in every minute; at the latest, she will return by one o'clock."

He took the chair with a slight inclination of his head, and there was silence for a minute.

"I am impatient to see Mrs. Ward," he began presently; "if you would give me an idea where her house stands, I am sure I should be able to make it out. You can imagine that I should be glad to avoid making any inquiries in the neighborhood that might draw attention to Mrs. Ward's retreat."

"I am so sorry to delay you," Regina replied, growing quite nervous; "but grandmamma would like, I am sure, to see you first. Mrs. Ward's health is so very delicate."

"My God!" he exclaimed, starting from his chair, "is she worse than when she wrote?"

"No; but she is far from strong, and the exertion of receiving a stranger" —

"Why, I believe you take me for an impostor," he replied. "If you know my mother's handwriting, I may be able to convince you of my identity. Here is the very letter that summoned me hither."

And, drawing out an envelope, he rose and extended it toward her. She recognized the very letter which she had herself carried into the hall on the first morning of Mrs. Ward's visit. The color rushed over her face.

"I am sure I beg your pardon," she cried; "I will show you the way in a minute. In five minutes you may reach the farm, if you go through the fields. I really did not believe you were Mr. Ward."

He drew back his head a little, as if he winced at the name. She took her bonnet and scarf from the couch, and led the way out of the room, taking the latch-key from behind the glass door, as she stepped into the garden.

No conversation passed as they went through the flower-garden into the orchard, and then, crossing the road, entered the Dingleby fields. She unlatched the gates, and he paused and closed them after her in silence.

At last he said, "I am sorry to bring you through the wet grass, Miss Arnold."

Regina longed to tell him her name was Howard; but she thought, after all, it did not signify.

"There is a pathway," she returned; "and it has rained very little."

"I suppose that, living in the country, you are indifferent to weather."

"No; we country folks are quite as fond of ourselves as any town's people can be. We are very much afraid of the wet."

He smiled for an instant, and there was another silence.

They came to a stile. Regina mounted neatly to the top, and then sprang lightly to the ground, just touching his offered hand.

"You will hurt yourself some day if you jump down from that height," he remarked coolly, after directing a quick, piercing glance at her slender feet.

She laughed, and shook her head; and they spoke no

more till they came to the five-barred gate that closed the field next to Dykeham farm-yard.

"That is the house; and, if you go through the stack-yard, you will come to the great door," said Regina. "And I hope, I'm sure, that I have made no blunder in bringing you," she added to herself.

He took off his hat and thanked her; and she sped home through the fields to meet her grandmamma.

"It is all very odd, my dear," said Mrs. Arnold, who had just returned; "but we shall be sure to see Mrs. Ward to-day or to-morrow, and then, no doubt, she will explain the mystery."

"You will take a little turn on the common, wont you, granny?" asked Regina, after dinner; "it is such a lovely evening."

"Yes, we shall have time for a nice walk before the dew falls. What a beautiful scene it is, my Regina!—What noble trees, what rich fern, what picturesque underwood! It is as if we possessed a magnificent park, without the burden of a great fortune."

"Indeed, granny, I don't think it is the same at all. If we had this fine park, suppose, how very different we should find the neighbors. Mrs. Chillingworth would then ask me to her archery fêtes."

"Yes, because you would ask her to yours; that is all fair, my Regina."

"And Winny,—oh, how sweet we should become! She would go about praising us, and saying, 'You know how I always loved dear Mrs. Arnold and dear Regina!'"

"But, my dear, you should not squeak," said the old lady, turning away her head that Regina might not see her smile.

"And so I wish I *had* a park and a great fortune," added Regina.

"That is not a possible wish, my love, unless, indeed, you should marry a rich man."

"And that is not likely, is it, granny?" laughed Regina; "but I am sure there is Mrs. Ward, and the gentleman who says he is her son, coming toward us across the common."

"My dear Mrs. Arnold, my son Alban is very anxious to make your acquaintance, and to thank you for all your kindness to his mother," said Mrs. Ward, as they met; then turning her laughing eyes upon Regina, she added, "You have seen my little boy before, — I need not introduce you."

"I am sorry, Miss Arnold, to have caused you some perplexity this morning," he said, turning from Mrs. Arnold, to whom he was expressing his sense of her goodness; "but you know where to lay the blame."

He glanced toward his mother, and continued speaking to Mrs. Arnold.

"Now I appeal to you, Regina, whether I ever said he was a little boy. Was it not quite your own idea?"

"You let me think so, Mrs. Ward, and even now I can hardly believe my eyes," said Regina.

"And yet, my dear, he is two-and-twenty, and a lieutenant in the — regiment of infantry. John Dods, you know, his servant, receives my letters for his master. They are at Glasgow, now."

"You look so very young, Mrs. Ward."

"Alban," said Mrs. Ward, as the party was all walking on a level, "Miss Howard thinks you will be so much amused in the stack-yard, watching the men thatching the new ricks, — and then the pigs and the ducks!"

Mrs. Arnold was laughing gayly at the joke; Alban just smiled for half a minute; as to Regina, she was feeling wretched. And when her grandmamma begged them to stay and drink tea, as her house was in their road home, she could hardly forbear making her a sign not to proceed with her invitation.

"Oh, about the ninepins!" exclaimed Mrs. Ward, as they entered the garden. "Have you found any more?"

There might be enough now to play with, — shall we ask him ? ”

“ O Mrs. Ward, if you would not ! You make me so miserable.”

“ Poor little victim ! But oh, Regina, I was so overjoyed to see him ! If you knew what he has been to me in all my troubles ; and yet you see I cannot help laughing. But he never jests.”

“ I should think not,” answered Regina, looking at his reserved countenance.

She could not help admitting that the passing smile which lighted up his features for an instant was very attractive ; but she never saw any expression so brief ; it was gone almost before you could mark it.

“ It will never do to attack him as I do Mr. Brand,” she thought. “ I must mind what I am about here ; and really it is difficult, I have got into such a habit of speaking my thoughts.”

In order that she might not say anything rude, she said nothing at all, and prepared the tea in grave silence, which rather diverted Mrs. Ward.

“ Regina is thinking of her promise,” she said.

“ What promise, Mrs. Ward ? ”

“ You promised to help me to amuse my little boy ; and I see, by your look, that you think it a hopeless case. You give it up, — don’t you ? ”

“ I do think you tease Miss Howard unmercifully,” said Alban, turning round.

Regina looked grateful.

“ And yet, for all that, Regina will do something for me that she would not for you, — she will sing me a song ! ” cried Mrs. Ward.

Regina was really glad to go to the piano ; she hoped the music would stop Mrs. Ward’s reminiscences ; and she either

played herself or urged her friend to play until it was time for her to go home.

CHAPTER VII.



WO or three days' rain gave Regina time to recover from her astonishment; but, during that period, she and Mrs. Ward were equally kept prisoners by the weather, and saw nothing of each other. At last, she was obliged to venture to Dykeham on an errand of charity. An old sick servant of Mrs. Arnold's had begged Regina to call upon her; but, though her way lay past the very door of the farm, she had not intended going in, had not Mrs. Ward, who was standing in the porch watching the weather, detected her at the entrance of the lane, struggling along through a quick, heavy shower, and sent her son to meet her and insist on her taking shelter.

"My mother complains, Miss Arnold, that you have deserted her," said Alban, as they entered the porch.

"It is true; while you are here, Mrs. Ward can want nobody else," answered Regina, shutting up her wet umbrella.

"Dear child,—so it is only a storm of rain that will drive you into Dykeham!" exclaimed Mrs. Ward, as she came to lead her in.

"O Mrs. Ward! you know I am only too glad to come, when you are alone."

"You have been away quite long enough for me to wish you back again," said Mrs. Ward.

"I'm so glad!" exclaimed Regina, frankly, taking Mrs. Ward's hand.

"And our duets?" inquired Mrs. Ward. "But I suppose you have not even vouchsafed a look at our grand affair from *Jessonda*, you have been so busy practising for your great concert."

"What concert?" asked Alban, who was now writing a letter at the other end of the room.

"Mr. Winter's concert, at Bradford, at which Miss Howard is to appear as prima donna," replied Mrs. Ward.

"No, — you are joking!" he exclaimed, coming up to the table.

"It is true, — is it not, Regina?" repeated Mrs. Ward.

"True, except that I am not to be prima donna," said Regina.

"Not to sing at all, I suppose," remarked Alban.

"Really, Alban, you are very rude this morning," cried Mrs. Ward; "of course Miss Howard is to sing, and to be very much admired."

"You don't mean it?" he said, turning with a puzzled air to Regina.

"Yes; but I think you don't understand. It is not a public concert, where money is paid; only a kind of a soirée Mr. Winter gives, at which the pupils perform and their friends form the audience. All the best people in the neighborhood do it."

"What, — let their daughters play to edify all the butchers and bakers who may chance to have their children taught by Mr. Winter?"

"My dear Alban, you are so very far from polite this morning," began Mrs. Ward, uneasy at seeing the color deepen on Regina's beautiful cheek. "I'm quite ashamed of him, my dear. Come and let me hear this new gem by Schubert. It gains upon me; but, though a delicious bit of harmony, it will never put me out of conceit of our own charming glee; and the song was meant for several voices, you know."

"But I must be going now, Mrs. Ward," said Regina, "yes, although it rains still. Granny will be looking and wondering; and, if I remained, it would not be to sing Schubert's 'Hark the lark!' I would rather Mr. Ward did not hear my rehearsal for the butchers' and bakers' concert."

"Don't let that influence you, Miss Arnold," remarked Alban, rising and coming down the room; "you will not disturb me in the least."

"You know my name is not Arnold," exclaimed Regina, pausing as she was about to leave the room.

"And you know my name is not Ward," he retorted.

"Yes, I know what it is *not*; but I cannot boast of knowing what it *is*," cried Regina. "You have the advantage of me there, if you choose to make use of your knowledge."

"Come, Alban, you must own yourself defeated," said Mrs. Ward, laughing.

He turned and bowed to Regina, rather condescendingly, she thought; almost as if he considered her a little girl.

"And then, my little Regina," continued Mrs. Ward, coaxingly, "you will tell your grandmamma that I long so much to see her; and, as she is younger and stronger than I am, I should be so grateful if she would bring you to drink tea with me this evening. I know it will be a brilliant night after all the rain; though I feel I am asking a very unbecomable thing."

"I think you are," said Alban. "What on earth can you offer Mrs. Arnold to induce her to wade through these lanes at ten o'clock at night?"

"But she *will* come, Mrs. Ward, I know," exclaimed Regina, indignantly. "She will have the fly. *She* can value your society, and think it is worth coming to Dykeham if it was only to look at your beautiful face."

And then she stopped all at once, very red and very shy.

They were in the porch, and the rain came through the little side-window.

"You had better go in," said Alban, addressing his mother; "you are getting wet through, and will have one of your chest attacks, if you do not take care."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Ward, be careful!" cried Regina; "but," observing that Alban had put on his hat and was opening her umbrella, "what is Mr. Ward going to do?"

"Mr. Ward is going to see Miss Arnold home," replied Alban, gently closing the door upon his mother, and offering Regina his arm.

"Good gracious! you must not. I won't hear of such a thing, — coming out in the wet for nothing! Mrs. Ward, do, pray, tell your son to go back into the house."

"I hope, my dear," said Mrs. Ward, "that he means to make amends for his rudeness; and he is right. He can protect you much better than you can yourself. You will have enough to do to keep your pretty pink muslin out of the wet."

"Oh, but, dear Mrs. Ward, it will never do. Only think if we were to meet Miss Hopper."

"I hope you may, my love. I want Alban to see her so much, and to hear her; it is nothing without the voice. Mind you stop and speak to her, Regina."

As Alban was standing in the rain, holding her umbrella over her with a calm and evident determination of going with her, Regina thought it best to set off as quickly as possible. She waved her hand to Mrs. Ward, and started.

"I see, thoroughly unprepared for wet; those little shoes will be soaked through in a minute," said Alban, coolly, when they were in the lane.

"If women wear clumsy shoes, people are disgusted," pleaded Regina; "and if they are too thin, we are accused of vanity or folly."

"Well, you have rather a hard life of it," he returned.

Regina thought of his mother; perhaps he was thinking of her too, for there was a long silence.

"I really hope you will forgive what I said about the concert," he said, gently. "I have no doubt it is all right; indeed, it must be right, since Mrs. Arnold permits you to appear."

"Mrs. Ward said that you were very proud," exclaimed Regina, who had not yet cured herself of saying whatever came into her head.

"Of course I am," he returned, coolly. "Every one is, who has anything to be proud of, and the others are vain; that is the difference."

"I don't think I am proud," said Regina; "but then, I am not rich."

"Well, where is this Miss Hopper to be seen?" he asked, presently.

"I'm sorry to say, she is very often to be seen where I am," laughed Regina. "I don't know what kind of sympathy it is that always leads us to go out at the same time, and to meet on the high road. There, do you see a person just come out of that cottage?"

"A tall woman, skipping about on a pair of clogs?"

"Yes,—holding an umbrella in one hand, and swinging a little basket in the other, with a foxy cloak, and a very short cotton frock."

"And that is the famous Miss Hopper! Is she coming our way? That's all right."

Regina could not help smiling at her companion, who seemed to think that Miss Hopper had come out for his special amusement; and, certainly, she had never appeared to more advantage. She struck out right and left among the puddles, her clogs clinking at every step, and tossed her little basket about with an airy gayety, like a child skipping home from school.

Winnie had her likes as well as her dislikes. If she disliked Regina very much indeed, she liked, with equal zeal, a fine, tall young man. She gave Regina every facil-

ity for meeting her, and opened the conversation by her usual shrill question, —

“Grandmamma quite well to-day, Regina?”

“Yes, thank you, Miss Hopper. I hope Mrs. Hopper’s lameness is better.”

“Thank you, dear mamma’s lameness is a little fanciful, — nervousness, I believe. I don’t encourage her to think at all about it.”

Regina raised her brows; Alban found it advisable to use his handkerchief; Miss Hopper continued, —

“And Mrs. Ward, — is her little boy come yet?”

The umbrella over Regina’s head trembled a good deal. Regina cried out, all astonishment, —

“Dear me, Miss Hopper, who ever told you anything about Mrs. Ward’s little boy?”

“Ah! ah! Regina,” cried Winny, squeezing up her eyes, which had hitherto been doing duty upon Alban; “a little bird told me, — I shan’t say who. Good morning, — wet day.”

“Surely,” said Regina, as they turned away, “she must listen at the hall-door, or under our windows. How *could* she have heard Mrs. Ward that evening?”

“I think I’ll sketch her,” remarked Alban. “If you have many such originals, Holmwood must be an amusing place.”

Mrs. Arnold readily agreed to take the fly to Dykeham farm that evening; and the weather turned out as Mrs. Ward had predicted, — bright and warm, with that perfumed freshness that always follows summer rain. Mrs. Ward’s rooms had acquired that home aspect which lodgings seldom put on. Her piano strewn with music, her stand of flowers, her small easel for water-colors, gave an air of elegance to the apartment that the good farmer’s wife had never dreamed of. She made a charming hostess. There was a little bright fire on the hearth for Mrs. Arnold, and a very

easy chair drawn close to it; and Regina could not but allow that Alban showed to great advantage by the courtesy and deference of his manner to her grandmamma.

"O Mrs. Ward! you have been sketching the pool in the meadows under the ash-trees," cried Regina, going up to the easel, "where we went one hot day while you were staying with us. When did you find time to do this?"

"One idle day," said Mrs. Ward, turning it carelessly over. "How do you like this face?"

"Oh, dear, Mrs. Ward, how pretty! I did not know you painted heads."

"Ask Mrs. Arnold what she thinks of it."

A suspicion flashed all at once into Regina's mind. It was herself! That clear, fine outline, that slender throat, and long plait circling the small head. She stopped short, coloring, and looked into Mrs. Ward's laughing face.

"Alban, show it to Mrs. Arnold; my only attempt at portrait-painting. My little friend here is seized with a modest fit."

"Oh, dear me! it is very like. It is my little Regina!" said the old lady. "I think, Mrs. Ward, I shall beg it of you."

"My dear madam, I am flattered beyond expression. Just let me put a few touches to the background, and the sketch is yours. So you think it pretty, Regina, you little, conceited creature!"

Regina was covered with blushes, and she knew that Alban's calm eyes were fixed upon her. If he would have looked into the fire, or out of the window, or at her grandmamma. She tried to shelter herself behind the urn, and asked Mrs. Ward to let her make the tea.

"My dear, I shall be truly grateful; no one detests more cordially than myself that sweet domestic occupation. Alban, we have not heard your opinion; can't you say something nice on the occasion?"

"On the picture, or the original?"

"Regina, I hope you will punish him for that by not singing. No, that would punish *me*; we must sing to-night. I hope you will look very black at him."

"I am, Mrs. Ward. I am not looking at all like my picture."

"Oh, she has a spirit! Now, Regina, old as it is, and despised very likely by the gentleman who is going, I observe, to play at chess with Mrs. Arnold, I am determined that we will sing, this dewy, moonshiny night, 'I know a bank.'"

Whether he despised it or not, he lost his game very fast to the silvery strain. Mrs. Arnold took knights and pawns and bishops in the most reckless manner.

The piano stood facing one of the large casement windows, open on account of the heat, with the blind drawn down inside. They were almost at the last bar, when Regina, standing behind Mrs. Ward, who played the accompaniment, and looking straight before her, saw the blind move forward, as if impelled by a hand from without, — saw, and heard the sharp rustle of the brown holland as it fell back into its place, and a thin, shadowy face looked in for such a brief instant that she could not tell if fancy had supplied the vision. She caught her friend by the arm.

"O Mrs. Ward! — a hand! — a face! — that window!"

Mrs. Ward sprang up with a shriek that rang in her ears long afterward, and rushed to her son.

"O Alban, help! — it is he! — help! help! there — the window!"

Alban, holding his mother in his arms, looked quietly at the blind, which hung perfectly still, and then at Regina, who had come up to Mrs. Ward's side, brave but trembling.

"You have nothing to fear," he said gently to his mother. "It is my belief, as I told you, that he is gone abroad."

"He might have tracked me; there is still something left,

— much for a desperate man ! Are you sure, Regina, — what face, — what sort of face ? ”

“ It was such a glance ; I could not trust in my eyesight, only I should have said something very ghostly ; not unlike,” she added, collecting her ideas, “ not much unlike the face of the miser.”

“ Ah ! ” sighed Mrs. Ward, sitting down, “ my dear Mrs. Arnold, what can I say, how apologize ? We have been two simpletons, who have let our fears get the better of us. But yet, Alban, if you did not mind looking out of the window, it would be a satisfaction to me to hear that there is no one outside.”

“ Yes, I think I can screw up my courage to that point,” he said, smiling. “ I will even go out, if it will be any pleasure to you, and search round the haystacks. The garden is very pretty and calm in the moonlight, — look at it, Miss Howard, — but I see no fairies.”

Regina advanced cautiously, and looked from the casement.

“ Alban, I wont have you go out ! ” cried Mrs. Ward, who was sitting close by Mrs. Arnold.

“ I am at your orders,” he replied, closing the window, and coming up to the fireplace.

“ Well, now, we have all been very much shaken, suppose we have some elder wine,” said Mrs. Ward, after a pause.

“ In the middle of June ? ” added her son.

“ Fear makes me cold, Regina,” said Mrs. Ward.

“ And me — feel my hands,” cried Regina.

“ I am not altogether warm,” remarked Mrs. Arnold.

“ Ha ! ha ! we are all agreed ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Ward, ringing the bell. “ Mrs. King, a tray of hot wine, with strips of toast ; we are playing at Christmas ! ”

CHAPTER VIII.



OW it happened that, on the morning when they met Miss Hopper, that moral lady had just danced out of a cottage, where she had been trying to convince a burly navigator that the church objected to the very large block of bacon, on which he was about to make his early lunch, — the day being Friday. She had held up before this unconscious Catholic-Protestant, or Protestant-Catholic, the shining example of Mr. Morley, who was, she knew, that very day going to dine with his whole family off a remarkably fine turbot. The navigator continued to ply his clasp-knife in the most reckless manner during this statement; but his wife, coming forward civilly, with a child on each arm, stated that though Jim's wages were uncommon high just now, owing to the tunnel, yet that fish was dearer than meat, and didn't go so far, and she made bold to think that fasting was not meant for poor people.

Jim, whose mind was still more perplexed on this subject than his wife's, was here heard to murmur, that, if the lady was so partial to fish, perhaps she would stand a red herring or so for tea; and he did not care if he *did* eat that for a relish. And then Winny, after trying to explain the nature of fasting, was induced to extract from her own pocket (a rare occurrence) the sum of four pence, to be laid out in Emden grits for the family meal on that day week. The poor woman gladly accepted the grits, having on hand a voracious pair of babies, who devoured a good deal more than their natural food, including strips of warm bacon from father's plate, and who would be very well contented to fast on good gruel all the week round.

It was no wonder, then, that she skipped forth in a state

of great exultation after this good deed, and that her pious feelings received an unpleasant check at the sight of Alban attending upon Regina. It appeared quite necessary to the upward flight of Miss Hopper's feelings, that she should be clearly informed of everything connected with Mrs. Ward. She knew, by hook or by crook, everything else that went on in the parish, and a mystery made her angry; and when Winny was angry, she had an awkward habit of contriving to say or do some choice little bit of mischief against the offender. So that, meeting Mr. Morley coming through the village at a swinging trot, with his umbrella tucked under his arm, she stopped him to say what a pity she thought it that Mrs. Ward, under her peculiar circumstances, should permit a handsome young man to be staying with her; that several of the tradespeople had remarked on her conduct; and, indeed, from what she could gather, Mrs. Ward was held in very light esteem by many; and, therefore "it *was* a pity — wasn't it? — that Mrs. Arnold should allow Regina to be walking about publicly with a young man, who might be so very incorrect?"

And Mr. Morley, becoming fierce (as the best of men will do when irritated) under the treble accusations of Winny, said that Mrs. Arnold gave him more trouble than all the rest of the parish put together; that she ought to recollect that she had been the wife of a priest, and to be ashamed of acting so irregularly; — though what could you expect from a Frenchwoman? — that he was driven a hundred ways at once, and could hardly find the day long enough; but he supposed he must call on Mrs. Arnold and remonstrate with her, since she had been, in some sort, a clergyman's wife, though he was but a dissenting kind of a person, after all. Thereupon, the gentle Winny, who thought nothing a trouble that might cajole Mr. Morley, offered herself, in his stead, to take the job off his hands and bully Mrs. Arnold in his name. But this suggestion was not liked; and he told

her in such very plain terms to mind her own business, that her tender heart was wounded, and she cried, smiling all the way she went, with the tears dropping off her nose the while, something in Cordelia's style, — she always cried so, — till she got home ; and snapped at her mother in return for having been snapped at herself.

Mr. Morley, therefore, took his way across the common the very next morning to see the delinquent ; no way appeased by the glorious sunshine which had replaced the cold rain of the day before, and was streaming upon the magnificent oaks that stood on the verge of the table-land which formed the parish of Holmwood.

Under those oaks, the boast of the whole country, the very group that occupied his thoughts were now assembled. The delicate old lady was seated on a cloak thrown over the large twisted roots of one of the trees ; and the suspected Alban, leaning idly against the trunk, was conversing with her. At a little distance, the superb figure of Mrs. Ward was seen bending eagerly over her painting ; while Regina, kneeling by her side, was watching the progress of her friend's pencil.

"Alban is quite incredulous, you see," remarked Mrs. Ward, as she dipped her brush into a color.

"I don't care," replied Regina, greatly irritated.

"Holmwood is a wonderful place," said Alban, coolly.

"And we are all so very brave by daylight, — are we not, Regina ?" exclaimed Mrs. Ward.

"And it is so very wise and grand not to believe," added Regina. "I don't see why it is impossible that some person should have looked at us through the window."

"Nor I, Miss Howard," said Alban. "It is, on the contrary, perfectly admissible to my reason that you should be looked at, whether through a window or not."

Mrs. Arnold and Mrs. Ward both laughed. Regina drew up her head.

"When people become personal," she remarked with dignity, "there is an end, of course, to the conversation."

"As the conversation is said to be extinguished," replied Alban, carelessly, "it will be superfluous in me to hint that there were no footmarks under the window."

"Ghosts don't leave footmarks, — do they, Regina?" cried Mrs. Ward.

"It must be a very heavy person, ghost or not, who could make footmarks on a brick walk," answered Regina.

"Ah! we forgot the brick path," laughed Mrs. Ward, looking back at her son.

"You have drawn long enough, and are quite fatigued. You never know when to leave off," was his reply, coming up to her and taking the pencils calmly out of her hand.

Regina noticed that he never used any endearing epithets to his mother; but his voice and manner suddenly softened whenever he spoke to her, and gave a tenderness to his address that no affectionate terms could have equalled. She could not help thinking that this manner, in so cold a person, was the most agreeable in the world.

"What shall I do without him, Regina?" asked Mrs. Ward, with a sigh. "He goes back to Scotland on Tuesday."

"Then I may take my humble leave of him this afternoon," said Regina, mockingly. "To-morrow being Sunday, I suppose we shall see nothing of you, and Monday I shall pass the day at the Winters', on account of the concert; for we have a grand rehearsal in the morning."

"And what do you mean to wear, little Regina?"

"Only a white dress, — a new one, though, — of spotted muslin, that granny bought for me last week."

"If I send you a wreath of natural flowers, will you wear them?" asked Mrs. Ward. "I'm rather clever at making up that sort of thing."

Regina gratefully accepted.

"What may that person want?" asked Mrs. Ward, carelessly, indicating, by a movement of her little sketch-book, a gaunt gentleman standing in the path a little beyond the trees, and signing with his hand toward the party.

"It is Mr. Morley!" exclaimed Regina. "I think he wishes to speak to one of us."

Mr. Morley, after beckoning to Mrs. Arnold to get up and come down to him, in vain, — for she respected her own gray hairs, though he did not, and she waited quietly for him to come to her with his errand, — then advanced toward her and called out, —

"I shall be at your house this evening, Mrs. Arnold, as I desire to speak with you."

And then he turned and left the group to themselves.

Now it is often the case, in this world, that when we are promised some little, agreeable treat, and are quite looking forward to it, some trifling circumstance deprives us of the expected pleasure; but this perverse interruption rarely takes place when anything disagreeable is hanging over our heads. So that Mr. Morley was ushered into Mrs. Arnold's dining-room about seven o'clock; and the charming old lady went down to receive him, while Regina, in the drawing-room above, was giving Mrs. Ward and her son, who had been persuaded to stay and pass the evening, a very lively account of her rector's and Miss Hopper's behavior to her grandmamma.

"It is entirely owing to Winny that Mr. Morley behaves with such disrespect to grandmamma. As for me, I believe he looks upon me as an outcast, because I am not one of Miss Hopper's followers, like most of the young ladies in the neighborhood."

"And what are their tenets, little Regina?" asked Mrs. Ward, laughing.

"They make a profusion of little worsted socks for babies, under Winny's orders, and they cultivate an unbounded love

for the clergy. Miss Hopper loves all babies, dirty or clean, and squeaks at them till the poor little animals are almost in fits."

"Here comes Mrs. Arnold to tell us of her visitor," said Mrs. Ward.

"Now, granny, we are all impatience to hear what our sweet shepherd has been saying."

Alban laughed suddenly at the epithet. The old lady shook her head at Regina, and told her to make the tea.

"Oh, it's too bad to go in a corner and whisper it to Mrs. Ward!" cried Regina, as she busied herself at the tea-table. "I am dying with curiosity."

"Mrs. Arnold cannot trust you," said Alban.

"Do you mean to say I cannot keep a secret?" she asked, hastily.

"Oh, not at all! You might *perhaps* keep a secret."

"What did you mean, then, Mr. Ward?"

"I need not tell you, Miss Arnold, because you know already."

"You meant to provoke me, for one thing."

"And I have succeeded. But it is very becoming."

"Will you tell me, — yes or no?" asked Regina, coloring still more deeply.

"I could not help thinking that Mrs. Arnold had some view to Mr. Morley's personal safety in her silence. She thought your feelings would be too much for you when next you saw him."

Regina was about to make a quick retort, when she was interrupted by a burst of laughter from Mrs. Ward.

"No, dearest Mrs. Arnold," she exclaimed; "I cannot keep this to myself! It is far too good. It is *you*, Alban, who cause that worthy man so much uneasiness, as Joseph Surface says. He insists upon it that you are not my son. Who would have thought, Regina, that my silly joke to you could have spread so far?"

"It puzzles me to know what Mr. Morley has to do with it," said Alban, haughtily, — "whether I am your son or your grandfather."

"I believe, Mr. Ward," replied Mrs. Arnold, gently, "that I am the object of his present anxiety. He arrogates to himself the right of selecting my friends."

"And do you not see, Alban," exclaimed Mrs. Ward, still laughing, "that if I am so flighty a creature as to entertain young men who are not related to me, I might, in time, lead Mrs. Arnold into the same bad ways, to say nothing of my little Regina?"

He gazed at his mother with the grave, perplexed expression Regina had often observed when Mrs. Ward was in high spirits, as if he wondered at her gayety; then, catching her meaning, colored suddenly with anger.

"I always ventured to disapprove your change of name," he said coldly, after a pause; "and you see now one of your difficulties. It is out of your power to prove anything under a feigned name."

"But, my dearest Alban, I was *afraid*. It is a word you don't understand; but *you* do, Mrs. Arnold."

"Perfectly, my dear," replied the old lady, taking her hand; "and, as far as *I* am concerned, I pay my own penetration the compliment of needing no proofs to assure me that you are worthy of esteem."

"You are all goodness, madam," said Alban, coming up to her; and, as she kindly extended her other hand to him, he kissed it with as much respect as he would have shown to a queen.

"Well, but we must consult," said Mrs. Arnold. "How are we to announce, dear Mrs. Ward, that this young gentleman has every right to visit you?"

"I advise my mother to resume her name at once," remarked Alban; "and then the gossips, far and near, will

have no difficulty in finding for themselves every particular connected with her. Our family is not unknown."

"Yes; but fancy persuading good Mrs. King, and Nelly, my maid, that my real name is Willingham," cried Mrs. Ward, laughing. "I should like it very much, but they would never believe me."

"These English are so hard to convince," said Mrs. Arnold, with a little vexed look; "or else I should advise your speaking confidentially to Mr. Carter, your clergyman (a very good man), and offering to procure proofs, if he desires it, of all you assert."

"If anybody tells me that Winny Hopper is not at the bottom of all this trouble, I won't believe them," exclaimed Regina.

"Throw your glove down, Miss Howard," added Alban.

"He can't take it up, if you do, Regina," laughed Mrs. Ward; "for he would hardly enter the lists as Miss Hopper's champion."

"What is to be done, Mrs. Arnold?" asked Alban.

"Nothing, I think, Mr. Ward," she replied. "We must wait. I am afraid that, if Miss Hopper could throw any light upon Mrs. Ward's retreat, she would be glad to do so; and her true name would be a great help, you know."

"I see no objection to that," replied Alban. "It is my belief that Colonel Willingham, my father, is gone to South America. I feel sure that my mother could live here in perfect security."

"But he might return. I dare not," said Mrs. Ward. "No; things must go on as they are."

"And now, granny," said Regina, "what can you say for Winny?"

"She is restless, my dear, and longs to discover what she fancies a secret; and I believe she talks herself into the belief that she is doing right, when we feel her to be very much in the wrong."

"And she wants to be first with Mr. Morley, and she envies Mrs. Ward her beauty, and she hates all those whom we love," cried Regina, all in a breath.

"And, my little Regina, the tea is ready to pour out," added Mrs. Arnold.

CHAPTER IX.



THE important day is come at last. All Bradford partakes of the excitement. The Sunday scholars of Miss Charlotte have been busied from an early hour in decorating the music-room with evergreens and summer roses, for which they are severally rewarded by Mrs. Winter, as they go out, with a large glass of cowslip wine, and an immense piece of plum cake. The instruments are tuned and arranged on the platform. Regina has withdrawn from the tea-table, which the hospitable old lady has converted into a banquet of every delicacy she could recollect, to make her toilet under the superintendence of Miss Winter. Miss Charlotte floats into the room devoted to the performers, to give the final touches to the sideboard of fruit and refreshments prepared for their gratification, and arranges her blue satin bodice and black ringlets before the glass. Mr. Bradford Winter saunters in soon after, not much better looking than his brother Richard, but very smart and scented, with white gloves and curled hair. Miss Field and Miss Clark, with the two Misses Rogers, arrive next with a roll of music apiece, and very stiff silk gowns. They sit drinking coffee, with flushed faces and trembling hands; and Mr. Bradford hands them cakes and pays them compliments. They think him very charming indeed. Then come the Misses Ram-

say, with a great many bracelets on, as gay as peacocks; and they stand by the side-table eating rout-cakes, and ignoring the presence of the young ladies who live in the town. And then come the Misses Chillingworth, who give themselves still more airs, and decline lemonade, and freeze Mr. Bradford with monosyllables when he makes some remarks to them about the new opera.

Mr. Winter now glides in among his pupils, dressed with his usual delicate precision, and says something gentle and kind to each, — quite as kind to Miss Field, the buttermilk's daughter, as to Miss Chillingworth, in her worked gauze and geranium bouquet; and, while he is going his round, Mr. Richard tumbles into the room, uncouth as ever, having, it is believed, made some vague attempt to arrange his hair, and calls out, — "I say, father, have you seen Miss Howard? She is just stopping on the stairs to speak to mother. Just look out, that's all, — 'Angels ever bright and fair!'" And with this quotation he falls into a chair by Miss Rogers, and stares audaciously at Miss Chillingworth's indignant countenance.

And when Regina, all unconscious of the announcement that has preceded her entrance, walks quietly into the room, they all feel the influence of a superior presence, though her worked muslin dress has no flounces, as Miss Chillingworth observes, and the Misses Ramsay are sure you could buy all she has on for a couple of guineas. But Mr. Winter thinks that Raphael never depicted a more spiritual vision than that graceful head, with its dark satin tresses crowned with a spotless wreath of the double paper narcissus, replacing the scroll of hair which now droops in rich plaits upon the slender neck; while Mr. Bradford finds no compliment good enough for the occasion, and Mr. Richard leans back and looks round with a self-satisfied air, as if he coolly challenged the society to produce anything to beat that!

Meanwhile the Ramsays flattered the Chillingworths with

deep-drawn vulgar breaths of admiration; and then the quartet pass away the time with a little pleasant gossip, which Regina hears, though she is not invited to take any share in it.

"Do you know, Louisa," whispers Miss Ramsay, "Mrs. Arnold arrived just as we did, and she had with her such a handsome young man!"

"No! Mrs. Arnold? fancy her with a young man! Who could he be?"

"Regina must know; — shall we ask her?" suggests Julia.

Miss Chillingworth looks haughty, and decides *not* to ask Regina. "After all, he could be nobody if he was with Mrs. Arnold," she declares.

"He is very like Lord Oswestry," remarks Eliza Ramsay.

"Impossible, child!" retorts Miss Chillingworth.

But Julia corroborates the likeness, and insists that the stranger is much better looking; that he has Lord Oswestry's air and complexion, without being so awfully pale.

Miss Chillingworth loses her temper in defending Lord Oswestry, and she becomes so personal touching the incapacity of ordinary people to form any judgment on the qualities of men of rank, that the Ramsays withdraw their remarks, and declare his lordship to be perfection; while Regina, who has recognized Alban by Miss Ramsay's description, is all astonishment to find that he has accompanied her grandmamma to the concert.

"Eight o'clock, father!" cries Mr. Richard, and he runs up the steps to the platform, makes a rough kind of bow to the audience, and seizes his violoncello. Mr. Winter follows, courteously leading Regina to her place at the piano.

The office of opening the concert had been assigned to her, because it was generally understood that the more indifferent players were to begin the entertainment. She pulled off her gloves with a desperate effort, and then, catch-

ing sight of the whole long wide room, crowded with faces she turned suddenly to Mr. Winter, and said, —

“I’m afraid.”

“Dear lady!” said Mr. Winter, with the gentle manner that took all the scorn out of his words, “they are only *people*. You are not afraid of Mrs. Ramsay? Don’t be afraid of a great many Mrs. Ramsays.”

He had touched the right spring. Regina sat down as firmly as if she were playing alone with him and Mr. Richard. The old man took up his violin, Mr. Richard drew the stormy soul out of his violoncello; the lovers of music had a real treat.

But, after all her beautiful clear playing, she was handed down by Mr. Winter with very little applause; for Mrs. Arnold’s fortune was very moderate, and there were not ten people in the room who knew whether she played ill or well, whereas there were two hundred who knew that Mrs. Chillingworth was a great lady, and Mrs. Ramsay as rich as a Jew; and it was well for Regina that she was contented with Mr. Winter’s praise, as he thanked her for doing so much credit to his tuition.

But when Miss Chillingworth mounted the platform, there was such a clapping of hands that Mr. Winter told her to acknowledge her reception by courtesying three times over; and when she broke down in that famous piece by Chaulien, the applause became louder still; and when, after several attempts to get on, she assaulted the piano, in a frenzy, with a shower of horrible chords in all manner of keys, the people seemed to be wild with delight, and continued to clap and cry bravo until she disappeared down the steps.

She was succeeded by Miss Ramsay, whose performance was more feeble, but less distinguished by original embellishment. Sophia Chillingworth and the other Ramsays succeeded each other; but, as they had chosen to play single-handed, their performances, though tolerably correct, fell

very flat when compared with the others. Miss Field and Miss Clark, with the Misses Rogers, played a beautiful arrangement from Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, for four performers, on two pianos, accompanied by a Mr. Clark and a Mr. Rogers (two young gentlemen in training for the law) upon two cornets. This piece was in itself so beautiful, and so well executed, that it was loudly encored, which delighted Regina, who had drunk in every note; while Miss Chillingworth remarked contemptuously, that "the noise was enough to stun anybody." Miss Charlotte's fantasia on the harp, accompanied by her father and her two brothers, was equally well received; but that, Miss Chillingworth could more easily forgive, because, as she said, "those people got their living by it."

Regina had to open the second part with Schubert's little air. Her beautiful voice, trained with the utmost care, was of course worth hearing; yet, had it not been for some of the less select auditors at the lower end of the hall, she would have been quite abashed for want of the applause that was lavished on all the other performers. But the but-terman was loud in her praises, and remarked to those around him, that "she looked like a angel crowned with the lilies of the field, a-hovering over the pianner," — which was very near the truth, so slight and spiritual she seemed, with her earnest gray eyes, and a voice that soared above the instruments as sweet as the flute stop of an organ.

A trifling incident now gave a momentary check to the proceedings; Miss Clark declared herself hoarse, and she was to sing the *alto* part of the *Et Incarnatus*; she said it was fright, but Miss Field affirmed it was toffy, — to which luxury Miss Clark was known to be much addicted. However, as Regina could clearly sing only the soprano, and as no one else knew how to read the *alto* clef, or indeed to sing at sight if they had known, the piece must have been given

up, if Mr. Brand, who was loitering in the doorway, had not offered to find them a substitute among the audience.

He returned, leading a very pretty little girl, about two years younger than Regina, with bright golden hair, and large, wondering blue eyes, whom he introduced as Miss Carleton.

"Do you know the *alto* part?" asked Regina kindly, offering her the book.

"Yes, I have practised it lately," she answered, blushing shyly. "Mr. Brand spoke of the piece some time ago, and said how beautifully you sang it."

"Then you live near?" said Regina, wondering how so pretty a face could have escaped her observation.

"No; I live at Kensington with my uncle and aunt; but I am staying for a few weeks with Mr. Morley."

"Miss Carleton's mother was Mr. Morley's second wife," said Mr. Brand aside to Regina; "his five younger children are therefore her half-sisters. Her mother left all her fortune to Mr. Morley, and this child is being educated by her uncle and aunt, with a view to her going out as a governess."

Regina was all kindness to the little girl, and whispered her not to be afraid when they went on the platform; and Miss Carleton clung to her arm, and read out of her book. She had a rich, full *alto* voice, and sang very correctly; and Regina took quite a fancy to her pretty, little, timid companion. The national anthem closed the concert, in which Miss Carleton still took Miss Clark's part; and then, as soon as the last notes of the organ had died away, the performers came down and mixed with the audience. The Misses Chillingworth were received with a perfect ovation; the Ramsays were generally complimented; Regina glided unnoticed behind them. Miss Carleton wished her good-night with a warm shake of the hand, and then Regina succeeded in making her way to her grandmamma's side. Mrs. Ar-

nold gave her a smile of approbation ; and Alban looked steadily at her, and said calmly, "Thank you !"

"The butterman is here !" cried Regina all in a breath ; "and he said I was a angel, for Mr. Richard told me so ! And I sang my very best on his account."

"Well, Regina," said Mrs. Chillingworth, turning round with a glare, "I think you are getting on : yes, you play better, certainly, than when I heard you last."

As Mrs. Chillingworth had not heard her for three years, Regina hoped she did.

And then Mrs. Ramsay, who had been extolling the Misses Chillingworth in her loudest tone, stretched out her hand to Regina, and with her large head all on one side, said, —

"You here, Regina ! You have not been playing, have you ?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Ramsay !" answered Regina, eagerly.

"My little Regina," remonstrated Mrs. Arnold.

"I could not call my little attempt *playing*," she rejoined, with mock humility.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Ramsay, good-naturedly ; "you will do better another time ; you know you are younger than Julia, and she has such talent, — such great talent ! We had a gentleman dining with us the other day, and he was talking of my daughters, and saying how grateful I ought to feel that they were so gifted. He remarked at the time that Julia resembled Lady Oswestry in her style of beauty."

As Lady Oswestry was a proverb in the country for her beauty, Regina thought this pretty well, even for Mrs. Ramsay. But she had not half done boasting, and Mrs. Arnold was obliged to say in her little voice, which stood but a poor chance of making head against Mrs. Ramsay's great one, —

"My dear Mrs. Ramsay, I must say good-night, for my little fly is announced, and is taking up the place of better vehicles."

The moon was pouring a flood of light and deep black

shadow over the quaint old town. There stood the curious timber house, with its black beams on a white ground ; and the tall church with its bell-tower hard by ; and the shallow steps leading up to the market-place, touched with silver light ; and the silence, always solemn and expressive, of a town by night, — so many buildings closed, so many restless lives hushed, and the summer air so ineffably sweet and fresh, — Regina felt an intense longing to walk, instead of being shut up in the fly, and she said so to Mrs. Arnold.

"Just only across the common, granny ; how lovely it would look !"

"My little Regina, I should have liked it of all things fifty years ago," said Mrs. Arnold ; "but now I'm afraid of the dew."

"If you will allow me to escort Miss Howard across the common," Alban suggested, "I think we shall walk as fast as you will drive."

Mrs. Arnold, who seldom found it in her heart to deny Regina anything, consented, and desired the driver to go at a foot-pace, while Alban offered his arm to his companion, and they set forward.

"That was very good-natured, and I'm much obliged to you," began Regina with her whimsical frankness.

"And I'm obliged to *you*," he said with equal frankness. "I think I shall never forget your singing to-night."

"I'm glad I sang well," answered Regina ; "I wished to do so for many reasons."

"May I ask what reasons ?"

"I wished of course to please grandmamma ; and then I was very anxious to do credit to Mr. Winter's teaching, for he takes a great deal of pains with me, much more than I can repay."

"I'm sorry for that."

"Sorry ?"

"Yes — I think those people should be paid, and have done with it."

"But there are so many things that you cannot pay. Why, a servant who has nursed you kindly and faithfully, you cannot pay with money. Grandmamma often says she can never pay Mrs. Nutt, who waited on my grandfather in his last illness. But I suppose," she added hesitatingly, "that you don't like to feel grateful."

"Yes, I do — to my equals; I like to feel grateful to Mrs. Arnold and you for your kindness to my mother."

"It's well," said Regina, half jesting, "that you will allow anybody to be your equals."

"Have you come to the end of your reasons?" he asked.

"No, — I had one more; and I'm almost afraid it was the strongest, — but you would not understand it."

"And why not?"

"Because you are a man; and it is only women who feel or understand slights. There were many of the neighbors present who I knew would despise my playing and singing, — not because it was bad, but because I was poor, — and so I resolved to do my very best. You need not laugh."

"It was very natural. And you did your very best; you sang divinely."

Regina colored, and trembled with pleasure; and they walked on for some time, saying very little.

Then Alban stopped and remarked on the great oaks drinking in the moonshine in large masses, — not a leaf stirring; the wide, pale sky behind unbroken by a single cloud. As they stood, the light shone down on Regina's graceful head, with its spotless crown, and illuminated her fine, pale features with such an ethereal radiance as no pencil could imitate or pen describe. As Alban gazed at her, he was reminded of a saint he had once seen pictured on a church-window, with the halo of the setting sun shining all round and through her form, till it seemed as if the air was made glorious with the radiant presence of a blessed spirit. In that semblance Regina was present to his thoughts during

years of absence ; and he could no more efface that moment from his memory, than we can any of us banish one of the grave recollections of life from that mysterious garner of our thoughts.

"My dear," said Mrs. Arnold, leaning from the window of the carriage, "do not let Mr. Alban pass the Dykeham turning. You can then get in, for we are almost at home."

Regina longed to say that she would rather walk that little way ; but a new feeling of shyness stopped her. It would be asking Alban to come a little out of his road, and seem as if — as if, she hardly knew what.

But before she had done thinking, Alban said, "I must see you to your own door, Mrs. Arnold ; I can cross the fields to Dykeham. You will walk those few steps farther, will you not ?"

Regina hesitated. Now, that he addressed her for the first time in that tone he so often used to his mother, she could hardly reply to the very thing she wished before.

"Do give me those few minutes more," he urged.

"Yes — I prefer walking," she said hurriedly, with a strange feeling of constraint, a nervous dread of getting home, and having to say good-by ; a wonder how he would take leave of them.

But they were soon at the gate. Alban handed out Mrs. Arnold, and thanked her and bade her farewell, and shook hands with Regina and was gone, all in a minute.

CHAPTER X.



TIME stole over Regina's head with very easy foot-steps for the next year. She spent a great deal of her time with Mrs. Ward; going over to Dykeham, and frequently persuading her friend to return and spend the day with her grandmamma. During the winter, indeed, these late visits were interrupted, because the cold air affected Mrs. Ward, and brought on her cough and spasms, so as often to alarm her friends, and induce them to urge her to consult their doctor.

But Mrs. Ward laughed away their fears, and said that Mrs. Arnold was her doctor, and kindness her best prescription; and that, she never failed to bring with her benign face. And 'by this time she had got to call Mrs. Arnold "granny," as Regina did; and indeed there subsisted between them almost the affection of mother and daughter.

Very little intercourse took place between Mrs. Arnold and her rector. Mr. Morley never forgave her friendship for Mrs. Ward, and her positive disbelief in all Miss Hopper's charitable suspicions.

But Mr. Brand, who was suspected of not thinking exactly like his rector on many points, was guilty of keeping up a sociable acquaintance with Mrs. Arnold. More than that, for few days passed that he did not find his way to the brick house; and people began to accuse him of having an eye to Miss Howard, who was growing now quite tall and womanly. Only Mr. Brand had exactly one hundred a year besides his curacy, and Regina, while her grandmother lived, had nothing at all. He had too much sense to think of making her an offer; only, like many other men, he had not sense enough to let her alone, but kept constantly calling,

and hearing her sing, and dropping in to tea, and talking over books, and looking over her drawings, and directing her little charities; and, though he had not much pretension to good looks, yet he was a gentleman in manners and feelings; and well it was for Regina that she had seen somebody she liked better.

But it is amazing how much interest Winny took in Mr. Brand's behavior; how she admonished him upon the sin of flirting; and how she would pursue him across the common, all the way from the village school to Mrs. Arnold's house; and catching him in the very fact, with his foot on the scraper, would find out that she also wanted to call on Mrs. Arnold, and so would go in with him; which he rather liked, for then he could leave Winny to talk to Mrs. Arnold, while he engrossed Regina.

I wish I could say that Winny improved as she grew older; but the fact is, she did not. People whispered that she looked down upon her home duties, while she ran about courting the clergymen and dictating to the poor, so that her lame, sickly mother was totally neglected; and, as Winny dined out most days with somebody or other, it was hinted what very little shabby scraps of dinners were reserved for poor Mrs. Hopper at home. But Winny thrived and prospered, and was greatly admired far and near. And, though Mrs. Arnold discouraged village gossip in her house, yet Becky did contrive to tell Regina that the poor (generally acute judges of their superiors' conduct) wondered at Miss Hopper looking after a young man like Mr. Brand, as much as they wondered at her horrid way of walking, or her singular soprano voice.

One fine, hot July morning, Mr. Brand was sitting with Mrs. Arnold and Regina, having called apparently to speak about some gray duffle cloaks for certain old women in the parish, which really would not be wanted for the next six months. Regina was copying an engraving of Lord Falkland from a

book that was going the round of the society, Mr. Brand was cutting her pencils, and Mrs. Arnold was taking down the old women's names at the other table, when Miss Hopper was announced.

"Of all the people in the world!" as Mr. Brand said half audibly, while he pointed the pencil he had taken up. Mrs. Arnold left her writing, and politely inquired after Mrs. Hopper.

"Quite well, thank you. Oh, her lameness is nothing; she has always been a little lame. Drawing, Regina? Mr. Brand giving you a lesson?"

"Taking a lesson, Miss Hopper," replied Mr. Brand, turning over the sketches in the portfolio beside Regina, with the privileged air of a frequent guest. She laid her hand on the sheet he was just about to take up.

"No, pray, Mr. Brand, — not that one."

"I wanted to look again at your sketch of Prince Rupert."

"There he is young, and there old," said Regina, selecting two studies, and laying them before him. "I hope you moralize duly on the difference, Mr. Brand. To this complexion must we come at last, — or something very near it."

"Nothing near it, in some cases, Miss Howard!"

His eye directed hers to the soft bloom that still lingered on her grandmother's cheek. Regina smiled and looked gratified, almost (Winny thought) affectionate.

"I think, Regina," she cried, "we may trust Mr. Brand to draw a profitable moral from everything; I think we all remember his sermon last Sunday upon Jacob's ladder."

"I think we do know the sweet Roman hand!" quoted Regina, looking at Mr. Brand with so exactly the tone and air of Malvolio when he addresses Olivia, that he fairly burst out into an uncontrolled peal of laughter; while Mrs.

Arnold shook her head, in the vain notion that she was concealing her smiles.

Winnie looked indignant. She thought they were laughing at her, and, with a tear in her treble voice, begged to be allowed to know what the joke was.

"I must lay the blame on Miss Howard," said Mr. Brand, struggling to regain his composure.

Regina watched him until he had just attained this desirable object, and then suddenly placed before him, taking care to screen it with the leaf of her portfolio, an exact likeness of Winnie herself, on her very highest pair of clogs, which sent him off again into a peal of laughter that threatened to be inextinguishable.

"They are both very silly, Miss Hopper," remarked Mrs. Arnold, in her little peace-making tone.

"Malvolio, you know, Miss Hopper?" said Regina. Miss Hopper didn't know.

"Oh! you should read *Twelfth Night*, Miss Hopper," pursued Regina; "or rather, if you wish to enjoy it thoroughly, you should coax Mr. Brand to read it to you the next time he has a cold, you know."

This rather meaning allusion to Miss Hopper's visits made her feel very ill-natured. She tried to find an arrow to fling at Regina in return.

"Haven't you taken Mr. Brand's portrait yet, Regina?" she asked.

"No, but I mean to attempt him the very first time I can catch a sight of him in his Geneva gown. I'm such a Protestant, Miss Hopper! and you know, Mr. Brand, I think your white robe so extremely demi-toilet."

"I know, Miss Howard, you are incorrigible!" he answered, with a smile. Winnie could not think what made him look so pleased. All her yawning did not seem to charm him so much as Regina's impertinence.

"Besides, the naughty Papists preach in the alb," con-

tinued Regina. "I would 'wear my rue with a difference,' if I were a clergyman! Although I hope you don't flatter yourself that your white gown is anything like a lovely laced alb."

"You are worse than usual to-day, Miss Howard; I appeal to Mrs. Arnold."

"I think she is, Mr. Brand. I was just doubting whether I should be able to induce you to take your luncheon with us to-day, after all this pertness."

Mr. Brand seemed perfectly contented to give this proof of his placable disposition.

Mrs. Arnold then felt obliged, in common politeness, to beg Winny to do the same; which she agreed to with the selfish eagerness and want of tact that characterized all her proceedings.

"And as luncheon is not quite ready," exclaimed Regina, "I know Mr. Brand will read me the grave-scene in Hamlet, while I finish my sketch."

He took the volume, laughing good-humoredly; Mrs. Arnold declared it was a pleasure Regina had not deserved.

"It's in a play, — isn't it?" asked Winny, fidgeting uneasily on her chair.

"Yes, rather a famous play in its time," said Regina, carelessly; "but you forget, Miss Hopper; you have no objection to plays *now*; all *that* was in my grandfather's day."

"The sooner I begin the better, I think," said Mr. Brand, smiling. Regina nodded, and went on drawing, with the pleased consciousness that he would come upon some strong expressions from Laertes, which could not be omitted with any regard to the sense of the dialogue; and which would make the innocent Winny, she hoped, run out of the house in dismay. But Winny had no mind to run out of the house, while there was a nice young man in it; she sat, smil-

ing patiently, while Mr. Brand, who possessed the rare talent of dramatic reading, gave the exquisite dialogue between Hamlet and the grave-digger ; and, though she certainly was startled by Laertes' fierce attack upon the priest, she bore it with such fortitude, that Regina feared the still more violent outburst against Hamlet would equally fail to dislodge her.

But her equanimity was destined to be spared this trial. At that very moment Mrs. Ward was announced, and she came in, looking so hurried and flushed — so excited either by joy or grief, Winny could not tell which, — that she set herself diligently to listen.

"Don't you wonder at me, granny, walking to see you through all this heat?" asked Mrs. Ward, laughing nervously.

"I am inclined to scold you, my dear ; but I will give you some luncheon instead."

"Thank you, granny, I can't eat ; but I am very thirsty."

They assembled round the table in the cheerful dining-parlor ; the room was cool and dark, and the simple meal was laid out with taste. There was a fresh, delicate fish salad, bread and butter, and a plate of excellent cakes ; a perforated china dish, made to imitate an osier basket, was heaped with fragrant strawberries ; and a large glass jug of iced lemonade, all dewy with the cold, completed the repast.

"This is delicious, Regina," said Mrs. Ward ; "your icing powders are perfection."

"Everything is perfection here," remarked Mr. Brand.

Mrs. Ward's eye lit on Regina for a moment with a comic look, and then went back to its restless expression. Regina grew more anxious every moment. Could anything have happened to Alban? No. Mrs. Ward would have been wholly unnerved if that were the case. She did not know how to interpret her friend's countenance. She only wished, with all her might, that the others would go. But there sat

Winnie, spearing her strawberries one by one with angular precision, and Mr. Brand, slowly sipping his lemonade and talking to Mrs. Arnold about Krummacher, as calmly as if they were not exhausting her patience.

At last Mr. Brand rose to go, and then you may be sure Winnie jumped up, and remarked that they were going the same way.

As soon as they were out of the house, Mrs. Ward drew her chair close to Mrs. Arnold, and said gently, "Granny, I learned this morning that I am a widow."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Arnold, "you are assured of my sympathy, whether you need it much or little. Some you must require when the most solemn act of your life is thus annulled."

"Yes, your sympathy is very dear to me," said Mrs. Ward, hurriedly, "and yours, Regina; but, to be free, you must have been abased to a slavery as bitter as mine to feel the word. How often have I looked forward to death to end my struggles, but not his!"

"And where was he?" asked Mrs. Arnold.

"In South America. Alban received the news, and sent it on to me. He will be here in a few days; but there is very little business to transact, I imagine. Colonel Willingham has spared me that trouble, — the only trouble he ever spared me," she added with a smile. "And now Alban advises me to resume my name. It will be enough to say that I assume it in consequence of the death of a relation."

"You will not think of going home to-day, my dear," said Mrs. Arnold; "you shall pass it quietly with us, and Field shall call at Dykeham to let them know."

"Oh, thank you! that is just what I shall most like. It is such a comfort to have friends to speak to when your mind is full."

"Only this afternoon," said Regina, as she established her

friend on the sofa by the open drawing-room window ; “you shall sleep instead of talking.”

“No, little Regina,” returned Mrs. Willingham ; “come and sit by me in that lowest chair, and I will tell you my history.

“I was a very rich heiress, — I hardly know how rich, for I had property in various ways ; as it is all gone, that little matters. One of my guardians, — for I was an orphan, Regina, — tried to marry me to his son ; but, failing that, he encouraged the suit of Sir Herbert Willingham, whose noble estate of Beyminstre gave him a fitting claim upon my wealth. I wish he had loved me less ; but he threw into his attachment all the force and tenacity of a nature proud, energetic, and sensitive, almost to disease.

“Without being able to share his feelings, I was touched and gratified by his devotion ; and his wealth and character alike enabled me to feel secure that I was chosen for myself, not for my fortune. And I fancied, because I could not return or even understand his idolatry, that my nature was incapable of an ardent attachment, and that I must content myself with the tranquil regard which he inspired.”

Mrs. Willingham paused. “I hate to look back to that period,” she said. “I was to blame ; but what an expiation has my life been ever since ! Shortly before our marriage, his younger brother returned from abroad. It was the year after Waterloo, and you cannot imagine the absurd enthusiasm with which every one was received who had been in the war. Those who fought for pay, or for amusement, or because they couldn’t help it, were welcomed with as much solemn admiration as if they had offered up their lives to the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre. I was more extravagant, more wildly besotted, than any of them. Colonel Willingham was brave, of course ; his fame had preceded him, and I fell in love with him at first sight. I was but seventeen ; he was a practised man of the world. He wanted

money, and he followed up the impression he saw he had made. Sir Herbert was obliged to be absent for a short time before our marriage, and Colonel Willingham persuaded me to take advantage of my few remaining days of liberty, and elope with him before his brother's return. This little I will say for myself, that I urged more open measures. I wished to tell Sir Herbert plainly that my heart had been won, and require him to give me back my promise. But I was overruled. I was in love, and therefore persuaded to anything; and we set off for Scotland the day before Sir Herbert's return.

"One incident I recollect: Herbert's own servant had discovered our secret just as we were starting, and followed me to the door of the chaise with the most earnest entreaties; he even hung on to the heads of the leaders in the vain attempt to stop our flight. Colonel Willingham drove over him, and he was for a long time incapacitated from giving the alarm.

"Many years afterwards I learned that Sir Herbert had munificently rewarded this poor man's interference, and established him in a house of his own. His name was Baker."

"The miser!" cried Regina. "Poor Sir Herbert!"

"Yes; his whole life was changed; he made no parade of his feelings, but he became so eccentric that Colonel Willingham tried to prove him insane, in order to get the property into his own hands. The attempt failed; but, if Sir Herbert could hate him more, such a step would of course have deepened the feeling. Well, a few months convinced me of my mistake. I saw all my fortune scattering to the winds, and I did not care at all. I could not force myself to mind it, until I thought of my child. He would be, literally, a beggar. Sir Herbert would marry one day out of pique, and his heirs would possess Beyminstre; and

Alban would have nothing, not even the means of earning his own bread.

"And the time at last came when we were beggars, and I knew want; and lived, selling one by one such articles of value as Colonel Willingham had not taken from me to adorn his favorites: when a relation died, leaving me twenty thousand pounds, tied up with all the formalities of the law, to save it from falling into my husband's hands. You may suppose that no intercourse whatever had passed between Sir Herbert and ourselves since my marriage; but I had some reason to hope sometimes that toward me and my son he was not so bitter as I deserved. As soon as I received my legacy, I intended purchasing a commission for Alban; but, when I set on foot the proper inquiries, I found it had just been done, and money paid, I suppose, by the same unknown benefactor. It struck me that, as Sir Herbert had not married, he naturally looked upon Alban as his successor, and desired that he should be placed in a position suited to his future prospects."

"And how old is Sir Herbert?" asked Regina.

"Twenty years older than I am," replied Mrs. Willingham.

"But my troubles were not over. Colonel Willingham heard of my legacy, and wanted it. It gave rise to such terrible scenes, to such abuse, such violence, that, if it had not been for Alban, I believe I should have yielded, and signed it away. Twice I gave myself up for lost. I thought he would have killed me; but once Alban saved me, and the other time I believe my husband reflected, that if I died the money would go straight to my son. In all these degrading scenes, Alban never lost his temper or his self-possession, and never behaved to his parent otherwise than he would have behaved to a father more worthy of such a son."

"And then, Mrs. Willingham"—

"Then Alban being in Scotland, I took fright at being alone in London, exposed to the chance of my husband's visits. I consulted my lawyer, changed my name, and came here, my little Regina. And, if you did but know how Alban has detested that unlucky name of Ward, — how he hated being called by it, or hearing me addressed as Mrs. Ward! Do you know, Regina, often, when I am most miserable, I cannot help laughing if a thought strikes me? and to see him draw back his head when you have said Mr. Ward, has often set me off, knowing him as I do."

"My dear!" said Mrs. Arnold, coming up to the sofa, "I will not let you speak another word till dinner-time."

"Then kiss me, granny, and I will lie quite still."

"Regina, how is it that you never have asked me for the sketch I made of you?"

"Because I thought you had not had time to finish it, Mrs. Willingham."

"Well; Alban carried it off, unfinished as it was; he thought it so precious as a specimen of my skill in portraiture, — nothing but that."

CHAPTER XL.



REGINA often wished that Mrs. Willingham had not made that unlucky remark about her picture. She felt quite sure that Alban had never thought of her in that way. He was far too great a person, with Beyminstre in the distance, to contemplate for a moment so disproportioned a match.

Mrs. Willingham was always making her blush by such allusions whenever she received a letter from her

son. She would mention that Alban desired his *kindest* regards to the young *prima donna*, and hoped that she practised her singing diligently. Or she would say, "You have no Scotch relations, — have you, Regina? — because Alban remarks that he has not happened to see any one in Scotland who resembles you. Now that is not very wonderful, as you have no connections there."

Regina did not know why she should feel so conscious; but she quite dreaded Mrs. Willingham's penetrating look whenever she mentioned her son. She was wretched at the idea of his returning, and took care never to go to Dykeham as the time of his arrival drew near.

One day Regina received at breakfast-time a little note from Dykeham, with these few words: —

"MY DEAR REGINA, — Alban did not come last night as I half expected, and I have not seen you for four days. I don't like to be disappointed both of my son and my daughter; so put on your pretty little straw bonnet, trimmed with violets, and walk through the fields to Dykeham, before the sun grows hot. — Your affectionate

"REGINA WILLINGHAM."

Whatever Mrs. Willingham asked her, Regina was pretty sure to do. She tied on her bonnet and little black silk cloak, took a scroll of drawing-paper in her hand, which her friend had commissioned her to get in Bradford, and set off directly.

She walked on slowly, her eyes bent to the ground, occupied with her own thoughts; hoping, if the truth must be told, that Mrs. Willingham would not be in one of her rallying moods. When she reached the gate leading to the Dykeham fields, a gentleman threw it open for her, taking off his hat as he did so. She looked up; it was Alban.

"I was coming for you," he said quietly; and she felt his grave eyes scanning her from head to foot.

"When did you arrive, Mr. Willingham?" she asked. "I had a note from Dykeham not half an hour ago, complaining that you had not come."

He smiled briefly, and said, "I believe I was at Dykeham when the note was written. The mail set me down there at five o'clock this morning."

"Oh," said Regina.

"My mother wished to see you, notwithstanding," he added; "and, you know, she will have her way."

"Yes," replied his companion.

"And how does your music go on?"

"Oh! I have left off learning now; grandmamma did not quite like my walking to Bradford so often with only Becky."

"Your grandmamma was quite right," he said; and his eye scanned her graceful figure again with a look of approbation.

"Now, look, Mr. Willingham!" said Regina suddenly; "there is the miser — the old man who peeped in at the window that evening; do you remember?"

"That withered old man at the stile? Is he mad?"

"I never heard he was."

The old man moved, to give place to Regina, and gazed at her attentively as Alban handed her over.

"I am glad you do not spring down in the reckless manner you used to do," he remarked.

"Consider my age, Mr. Willingham!" exclaimed Regina; "I am obliged to be discreet, often against my will."

It was odd she did not feel embarrassed when alone with him. His composure secured her own. It was quite different when Mrs. Willingham met them laughing in the porch.

"So! Alban has succeeded in bringing you," she said; "I thought we were never to meet again; thank you, though, very much for my paper."

"Is it right, Mrs. Willingham?"

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"Exact; just the proper roughness for water color. Is she not grown, Alban?"

"Very much, I think," he replied.

"Grown *what*?" she asked, looking up archly into his face.

"Tall," he said, calmly.

"It is a matter-of-fact age, Regina!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham, drawing her into the sitting-room; "we must take it as we find it; we cannot change things."

"We cannot change others, but I think we can help being matter-of-fact ourselves. I dread nothing more than becoming like other people," answered Regina.

"I suppose, by that grave inclination of his head, he means something profound, like Lord Burghley," exclaimed Mrs. Willingham. "I will interpret for him. He means that you cannot, if you try, become like other people; in your case, nature and education alike forbid it."

"Give me your paper, and I will fold it for you, he said; "it will fall a sacrifice to your eloquence in another minute."

"Let us go out into the meadow and sit by the brook," said Mrs. Willingham, "when this gentleman has finished his occupation; and perhaps he will read to us; though he cannot rival Mr. Brand in the accomplishment. Eh! Regina?"

"I am ready when you are," returned Alban, who was quietly folding the paper, without looking up.

They were very happy sitting under the tall ash trees that morning, at least Regina was. They worked idly and chatted. Alban was curious about Miss Hopper, and Regina could not help giving one or two dramatic scenes, in which that lady was represented persecuting Mr. Brand, or crying at one of Mr. Morley's unceremonious lectures. She did the crying so well, minus the tears, that Mrs. Willingham shed real tears (of laughter), and even Alban's grave smile deepened into mirth. Then Mrs. Willingham insisted

on her reading to them some of Lamartine's delightful little story *Le Tailleur de Pierre de Saint Point*; and she could not help knowing that she read French perfectly, and Alban admired the reading, but condemned the book; and Mrs. Willingham joined Regina in defending it, and assailing his stubborn English prejudices. And then the society, the very presence of Mrs. Willingham, was to her as fresh a delight as ever. It was a pleasure to sit near her, to watch her resting, with the superb grace of a Circassian, after her walk; to gaze on her pearly hand; to see an idea steal into her dark blue eyes, and unclothe her beautiful lips even before her languid voice was heard. And there was a vein of humor and of quaint illustration in what she said, that was still more piquant from being spoken in so indolent a manner.

If Regina had a wish, it was that Mrs. Willingham would not throw so much meaning into her jests when speaking to her son. She felt that, setting all else aside, the very devotion that Alban had for his mother placed him at a greater distance from her than even the future possession of Beyminstre. She had never seen a woman who could compete with Mrs. Willingham either in beauty or acquirement; and the high standard which his mother's qualities raised in his mind, would make him more than commonly fastidious in his ideas of women. All her little vanities and pleasant self-conceits dwindled away, as they always do, before the first dawn of a true attachment, like stars before the sun. What a trifling, unformed girl she seemed to herself! She wondered how she could talk and laugh with him as she had done; and the next moment some odd thing he said made her laugh and jest as easily as before.

However, though Mrs. Willingham scolded, Regina could not spend the whole day away from her grandmamma, and she was obliged to take leave; and then Mr. Willingham would escort her through the fields, he was so very well-

bred, — that was the only reason ; and when he opened the last gate for her, and she crossed the lane to her grand-mamma's field, she happened to turn round, and her heart gave a sudden throb to see him standing just where they parted, looking after her as it seemed. But he raised his hat calmly when he met her eye, and walked back with such composure that she was ashamed of herself for the thought ; and tormented herself all day, without being able to make out whether he would or would not consider that her unlucky movement had been without design. The next day, Mrs. Willingham and her son walked over to Holmwood, and found Mr. Brand, as they might often have done, sitting with Mrs. Arnold and Regina at the drawing-room table, and tearing a note into alumets by way of pretending to be employed.

Regina was searching in her netting-box for some silver.

"There, Mr. Brand," she said, scattering some six or seven shillings before him, "that's all my worldly wealth at present, all my disposable property in the way of charity till next month ; that will furnish Goody Leech with the flannel, — well, *tunic*, grandmamma — of which she stands in need ; but it will *not* enable me to subscribe (tell Miss Hopper, with my love) to the 'Ladies' Babies' anti-Godfrey's Cordial-Association,' unless she would like to accept of the three-halfpence change which I foresee will remain from the tunic."

"My dear Regina, do not be so ridiculous !" urged Mrs. Arnold.

"Well, then, Miss Howard," he remarked, "you will buy the garment for Widow Leech."

"No, — *you*, Mr. Brand ; you are a better judge of flannel than I am ; and, if you go to market judiciously, you may squeeze a pair of stockings besides out of the money."

"What is this weighty question ?" asked Mrs. Willingham, drawing her chair up to the table.

Regina told her, while Mr. Brand piled the shillings into a little heap together before her, as if thinking that the best way of declining the commission ; or perhaps imagining that it was rather a waste of time to have recourse to words. He then rose to take leave, glancing rather suspiciously at Alban, who, to do him justice, did not seem in the faintest degree discomposed in his turn.

"Mr. Brand," called Regina, following him to the head of the stairs, "consult Miss Hopper about it. There is matter for at least a dozen visits in the breadth of that one flannel stole."

"Ah, Regina!" cried Mrs. Willingham, archly, as she returned to the room, "Mr. Brand is such a favorite of mine that I will not let you ill-use him!"

"I could not, if I wished it, dear Mrs. Willingham," said Regina. "I don't think honest people have the power to do harm."

"Granny looks quite flushed and uncomfortable!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham. "I shall have a little private chat with her, while you take Alban into the garden, and give him a lecture on yellow carnations."

"Will you come?" asked Regina going to the window, from which a flight of steps led down into the flower-garden.

"We are turned out, it seems," he replied, as he followed her.

"What is it, granny?" asked Mrs. Willingham.

"My dear, I am puzzled about Mr. Brand," replied the old lady; "he begins to come here rather too much. You see my little Regina was always a child; but, lately, she seems to grow up, and you know that neighbors are very ready to talk. I feel sure that he is not paying her his addresses, and her feelings to him are but friendly; still this will not appear to our friends, and it will do her no service that their names are coupled together."

"People will talk, granny, — let them!" said Mrs. Willingham, endearingly. "In my opinion, it serves Mr. Brand quite right for acting in a way that might mislead any young girl. Much as I like him, I have no patience with the man."

"I should have less," returned Mrs. Arnold smiling, "if I did not feel quite sure of my little Regina's heart; but I am afraid that will be touched only through her imagination; and Mr. Brand's good qualities are not of the order to captivate a whimsical temperament, — half child, half artist."

"You have described her exactly, granny; put Mr. Brand entirely out of your head. Besides, I have a better match in view for my favorite."

"You, my dear?"

Mrs. Willingham leaned toward the open window.

"Yes; look at them, granny."

They were standing on the grass-plat, close to one of the flower-beds; Alban had some roses in his hand, and Regina was mockingly refusing them, with that little bird-like gesture of the head that made her look so capricious and tantalizing. He held them steadily toward her, — she clasped her hands behind her; he strewed them at her feet, — and then she suddenly darted across the lawn, and flew as if her feet had wings up the steps into the drawing-room. Alban turned and looked after her with his momentary smile, and then slowly followed.

"What is all this closeting and whispering? I *will* know, granny! I won't be kept out," cried Regina.

"We don't want you; take your knitting, and sit under the mulberry-tree!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham, playfully throwing her a cambric handkerchief, half embroidered, that lay on the table.

"I'll not stir. You shall not bribe me into good-humor with a handkerchief, like Iago," cried Regina, assuming a tragic attitude. "I know it is something about Winny Hopper."

"It is not, indeed, Regina. I wonder, Alban, that you cannot manage to keep this perverse child out of my way."

"Come, then," he said, "if the conference is not ended," — just as he would have spoken to a child. Regina gave him a little, mutinous look, and stood still.

"But I think, my dear, we have quite done," said Mrs. Arnold, gently.

"Done! — oh, you naughty granny! when we had not even made a beginning."

"I'm quite puzzled, my dear," said Mrs. Arnold; while Alban quietly took up the cambric and the little ivory work-box beside it, and walked off to the seat under the mulberry-tree.

"Go, Regina; he will destroy your thread, and scissors, and everything, if you don't get them out of his hands. Men always do," laughed Mrs. Willingham.

Regina ran down the steps to claim her property.

"And now, granny, I don't know how to begin," said Mrs. Willingham; "stay — the plainest way is always the best. My Alban loves your little Regina. That does not surprise you, — does it?" Yes, it did surprise her so much as to deprive her of words.

"You see, my granny," she pursued, in her low, coaxing voice, "Alban would say nothing to her till he had learned your sentiments. He is too honorable; but he has loved her — oh! ever since last year. It seems perfectly natural to me; it could not well be otherwise. I think she must like him just a little; don't you? He is perfect, — he is, indeed, granny; he is truth itself. He would not do anything he considered wrong, or even *unfit* (if you understand me), for all the world could offer. Except his pride, which I own I think a merit, he has not one single fault. And then, though he is poor now, yet Beyminstre *must* come to him, it is so strictly entailed. He will have fourteen thousand a year and the baronetcy. And, granny, you *must* say, — yes!"

"My dear, I am very much flattered and charmed, but I cannot say *yes* for a long time to come," replied Mrs. Arnold, collecting her ideas; "your son's prospects are so much above" —

"Not above her merit or her beauty," cried Mrs. Willingham, impetuously; "or her birth either, if you come to that."

"So much above her position," continued Mrs. Arnold gently, "that it must take some time for your son to convince himself that he would be content to select his wife from such a retired and moderate condition of life."

"Alban will never change," said Mrs. Willingham; "that is another quality which I admire; but some people might think him almost *too* firm."

"My dear, all I have heard and seen of him leads me to rejoice in the thought of intrusting my child to his care. But you must let us have our pride, too, dear Mrs. Willingham. Your son is young. You must let us feel that we have not sought to fetter him so early in his career. Let him put aside this idea for the present. I am sure, Regina is quite unconscious of any such thought, and you know she is but sixteen, my dear; there is no hurry."

"But you like it, and you wish it, and you will let him visit here, granny?"

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear."

"And as for the rest — oh, here she comes again, and I have not said half; no matter, another time will do."

• CHAPTER XII.



O Alban was expected at Holmwood every day as a matter of course ; soon expected by Regina quite as much as by Mrs. Arnold. Sometimes his mother came with him, but oftener he walked over to arrange plans for their meeting in the evening either there or at Dykeham.

He would often beg Regina to sing, but he never praised her. Not all her little devices could draw forth another such compliment as he had paid her that moonlight night on the common.

"Do I sing worse than I did last year?" she asked, half pettishly, one day as she rose from the piano ; vexed at the calm "Thank you !" with which he had as usual rewarded her efforts.

"No ; better, I think !" he replied calmly ; she dropped into a low chair, and took up her netting.

His manner perplexed her more and more every day. Often, when he had taken leave, she longed to speak to her grandmamma, and beg that she would prevent him from coming again ; and then she was deterred, by not knowing how to enter upon the subject.

One morning she was particularly out of spirits. It had rained all the day before ; and the damp grass and steaming juniper bushes on the common in front, had a certain depressing influence on her feelings. And then Alban had not come all day, and, though this was the very thing she so often wished, yet she felt his absence like a weight on her heart. It is true that a little note at night, which ought to have been delivered in the morning, enlightened her as to the cause of his non-appearance ; but this, I am sorry to say, made her cross ; because, as she argued, it could not possibly

matter to her why he stayed at Dykeham instead of loitering his morning at Holmwood.

"I am very selfish (Mrs. Willingham wrote) to keep Alban here, when I know he wishes to be at Holmwood; but I am suffering to-day with my horrid spasms, which always give me a feeling of dread; and I am more easy when I frighten him as well as myself; so, forgive me till to-morrow.

"R. WILLINGHAM."

And the next morning, which was a perfect blaze of summer beauty, Regina sat eagerly listening for every footstep, and was rewarded about noon by seeing Mrs. Ramsay's carriage drive up to the door, and that large lady alight, followed by the merry Miss Hopper. Mrs. Arnold was visiting a poor neighbor, at which Regina rejoiced; for she knew that guests of this kind were very apt to fatigue her grandmother. Mrs. Ramsay was at once so condescending, and so little at her ease, that it was difficult to talk to her; and a feeling of constraint, like a nightmare, used to come over Regina in her great presence.

In vain Regina remarked on the rain, on the corn, on the show of wall-fruit, on Mr. Miller's illness, and on the accident that happened last week in the hay-field; she came to a stand at last; the more completely, as Mrs. Ramsay contradicted all she said, angrily, like one convinced and indignant that she was telling falsehoods.

Thus Mrs. Ramsay insisted that it had not rained *much* yesterday, — that is, not much for a thunder-shower; then she *wondered* how Mrs. Arnold came to have so many apricots, for all she knew was that she had next to none, and she *believed* that her gardeners, all three, were tolerably clever in their business. Oh, dear! no; poor Mr. Miller was not at all better, — far from it! at least that was the reply given to *her* inquiries, and she could not think how it was that Mrs. Arnold had received a different answer; and the man in the

hay-field who had stepped on the scythe, did it on *Toosday* (for so she pronounced the day sacred to Mars), and not on Wednesday, as Regina had declared.

"But our object to-day," pursued Mrs. Ramsay, with a sidelong movement of her large head toward Winny, "was to congratulate you, my dear. A very excellent young man; and I'm sure I hope you may be happy."

Regina's whole face became crimson.

"Rather nervous just at first, talking it over," cried Winny, screwing up her eyes. "Mr. Brand puts a bolder face upon the matter."

"Mr. Brand!" echoed Regina, looking very much relieved.

"You are very fortunate, my dear," quoth Mrs. Ramsay, looking grandly down upon the slender Regina; "I hope you may make a valuable, hard-working curate's wife. Mr. Brand, I know, has nothing at present, — quite a beggar, if one might apply such a term to a clergyman."

"Ecclesiastic?" suggested Miss Hopper.

"But what I was about to say," pursued Mrs. Ramsay, not venturing on so long a word as that supplied by her friend, "I hope he may get some preferment sooner or later, and they are both young enough to wait, Miss Hopper."

"To be sure; and it is so delightful, after trying so very much, to succeed at last," added Winny; "isn't it, Regina?"

"And now I hope she will steady into a good notable housewife," cried Mrs. Ramsay; "all the little attempts at music and painting, and all that sort of thing, laid aside for sewing, marketing, and household arithmetic."

"Only I am not going to marry Mr. Brand," said Regina carelessly.

"You have not refused him?"

"No; but I am not going to marry so many people, whom I have not refused either."

"Ah! you see we are a little premature; it is not talked

about yet," remarked Mrs. Ramsay turning to Miss Hopper. "But what *you* have told me is quite enough." Then, getting up slowly, she added, "I shall give you something useful, my dear, toward house-keeping; no foolish ornamental trifles, but a solid flour-tub and rolling-pin, that Mr. Ramsay bought at a sale not long ago; and Mrs. Chillingworth means to do just the same."

"As I am not likely to put my friends' generosity to the test," said Regina coldly, "I will keep my gratitude till it is needed."

"Must not be impatient, Regina," cried Winny; "time will pass. And I think I would go to church early on saints' days if I were you. It would so please Mr. Brand!"

"As it is not my object to please Mr. Brand, I shall leave the early service to you and the pew-opener, Miss Hopper," said Regina.

"We must not keep the carriage waiting," exclaimed Mrs. Ramsay; "Anthony will not bear it, nor Roberts either. Good-by, my dear. Regards to Mrs. Arnold. We never meet now, somehow or other."

Regina made a heroic effort, and consigned her slender fingers to the pressure of the broad palm extended toward her. Winny blinked and giggled, and the guests took their welcome leave.

"It is well they are gone!" exclaimed Regina, throwing herself back on her chair. "I could not have been civil a moment longer; I should certainly have exploded, and said things they would never have forgotten. Such insolence! as if I could even *think* of Mr Brand! It is well they never hinted at — at another person. I could not have borne to be accused of attentions I have never received, and which *he* has no idea of paying. And their charitable offerings, too! to me! — because I am poor. Does it not almost make one wish for any lot that would bring these creatures to one's feet. I might tread on her neck if I had but twice her for-

tune, and she would let me, and thank me too. As for the other, she is not worth thinking about, — not worth treading upon."

But for all that she walked to the window, and stood wiping the indignant tears from her eyes.

"In tears? Why, what is the matter? I never saw you cry before," exclaimed Alban, entering with one of his mother's twisted notes.

"And you would not have seen me now if I could have got out of the way," answered Regina. "I hate to be seen crying."

"Naturally," he replied; "but what is it?"

"Something disagreeable that Mrs. Ramsay and Winny Hopper have been saying to me. I need not say that it is all Winny's doing."

"Winny is an old ferret! but don't cry, Regina," he said coming up to the table.

Mrs. Willingham had laughed him out of saying Miss Howard, but he had never used her name before.

"I've done now," she replied, coloring and smiling; "is that note for grandmamma? I will give it to her when she returns."

"It is merely to beg Mrs. Arnold to take compassion on my mother, and drink tea with her, — with you of course. *Don't* cry, Regina."

"I don't, Mr. Willingham," she replied; but still the tears came stealing to the ends of her long eyelashes, and were dashed away impatiently with the back of her hand.

"What is it that has vexed you? I have a right to know. I would do anything to set your mind at rest. I love nothing so well as you, Regina, — not even my mother!"

There was a breathless pause: she suffered her hand to remain in his, and her eyes were fixed on the ground, but Alban was satisfied. He knew that she would not have left

him in suspense the tenth part of a second, if she had been indifferent to his suit.

"Well, after all, what is the grievance?" he asked, as he led her to a seat.

"Something impertinent that Winny said about me and Mr. Brand; which had no foundation but in her own jealousy."

"Oh! I understand."

"And then Mrs. Ramsay offered me a flour-tub, and said a great many rude things reflecting on my poverty."

"One day, Regina — you — you know what I mean — you will be placed as far above these Hoppers and Ramsays in wealth and social position, as you are in everything besides."

It was the very echo of the thought that had crossed her mind when stung by their paltry sneers, but now she shrank from it as from the shadow of a sin.

"Oh, Alban, stop!" she cried; "don't let me think your prospects have anything to do with my feelings; don't suggest to me what my pride is too ready to whisper! My future is bright enough, believe it without Beyminstre!"

"Do you know, Regina," he said, "I am sometimes half afraid that you will melt away altogether into thin air, you look so spiritual? I believe you are the noblest creature that ever existed, and your future *shall* be bright, if I can make it so."

"And you must not depend too much on Beyminstre," urged Regina; "you know Sir Herbert may marry."

"He marry! a woman like my mother is not so easily replaced."

"You know well I think no one can compare with Mrs. Willingham; but — people marry for so many reasons."

"I *know* Sir Herbert wont marry!" replied Alban decidedly, "and every stick of Beyminstre is entailed. What

can he do against me, let him try his utmost? He can't live forever."

"Suppose he were to cut off the entail?"

"Simpleton!" said Alban, with his brief smile, "he cannot do that without the consent of the next heir, that is, myself. The only question is, Regina, how long we are to wait, and that we cannot tell."

"These silly, hasty young folks have settled it all to their satisfaction, it seems," remarked Mrs. Willingham that evening, when they were all sauntering up and down the quaint old garden after tea.

"Nothing is to be even thought of at present in the way of settling," said Mrs. Arnold, earnestly.

"No; not until we can be Lady Willingham of Beyminstre, it seems," laughed Mrs. Willingham.

"I imagine that no one here expects me to wait for that," cried Alban.

"Still, my dear young friend," urged Mrs. Arnold, "you must be a little older, and Regina too, before I shall be at all convinced that either of you know your own mind."

"Regina will know her own mind when she sees Beyminstre," said Mrs. Willingham. "Such a lovely place! so gray and gothic, with such delightful mullioned windows! Oh, how many years have passed since I was there!"

"The only fault is the conservatory which joins the right wing," said Alban; "it spoils the outline of the building."

"But how pleasant!" cried Regina.

"Yes, in a cottage; but in a house of that character you should consult the outline above everything."

"What is the derivation of the name?" asked Mrs. Arnold.

"You, who are learned, dear granny, know that a minster is a church served by monastic clergy. The old priory of Beyminstre was close to such a church, — by the minster. The said minster has become the village church, and the

house is in fact the old priory, repaired and converted into a dwelling."

The evening passed only too quickly for Regina; she was in a happy dream. Alban was so different from what he had been. So many little phrases seemed to have a meaning now which she dared not interpret before. As he wrapped her shawl carefully about her throat before escorting her home, she exulted in hearing him say, —

"You must not take cold, and spoil your beautiful voice, which I never praise, because I cannot praise it enough."

How keenly she appreciated his never saying these things before, until he felt that he had a right to say them, and she to hear them, without embarrassment!

CHAPTER XIII.

BUT it is not a very common thing for happiness to last forever. Regina knew that there must be a cloud upon hers, for she was aware that Alban would soon have to return to Scotland; but she was not quite prepared for what was coming. His regiment was ordered suddenly to India, and to the Afghan country, where the first dreadful news of our reverses had just reached England. If their marriage had even been agreed upon, this would not have been a time for it to take place. The capture of so many English ladies was a sufficient warning against taking out any more for the present; and Mrs. Arnold was decidedly against a marriage, or even an engagement between them, taking place so early. She repeated what she had at first said, that Alban's prospects entitled him to look higher than her

grandchild, and that she would not permit him to leave the country fettered by a tie which, however his sentiments might alter, he could not but find it difficult to break. Alban listened to this decision with calm politeness. Having made up his mind to marry Regina as soon as he could offer her a home, and feeling quite convinced that he could not take her among the Sikhs, he allowed Mrs. Arnold to make all the remarks she pleased on the subject, respected her scruples, and quietly thought over his future plans. These all centred in Beyminstre ; he was never weary of describing to Regina the house and the grounds, and picturing the time when she would have an equal interest in the place.

Regina used sometimes to endeavor gently to lead his thoughts from Beyminstre.

"If anything should happen," she urged ; "if by some turn in the future, that we cannot foresee or imagine, Beyminstre should not be yours, I dread to think of your disappointment."

"So do I, Regina ; my heart is set upon it. I wont say my *whole* heart ; but, let me turn and twist the future as I will, I see nothing, absolutely nothing, that can prevent my having it."

"But, Alban, what unforeseen things happen constantly ! Who would ever have thought that you would be going to India, and so soon ?"

And her eyes began filling with tears.

"Well then, my Regina, we will not speculate on Beyminstre ; one thing I have never done, and never will do, and that is, to borrow money on the strength of my succession."

"We must be moderate in our ideas, that is all," pursued Regina. "We shall not be so very miserable ; people who are not greedy can live on so little. I only wish, in case of the worst, that I had a large fortune instead of a very little one."

"Don't wish that, Regina; I could not exist a day, — I, a poor man, on my wife's fortune, eating her bread, wearing her clothes, riding her horses, — I declare I know nothing so base. People do it, and look you in the face, but I wonder at their assurance. I am all for the Turks, who buy their wives instead of selling themselves."

"Still I am not to be bought, let me tell you!" she added gayly.

"We understand each other," he remarked; "we are affianced. I have the highest regard for Mrs. Arnold's feelings; but, with my sentiments, it is absurd to talk of being unfettered. I suppose you do not think that I am very likely to change; and, young as you are, I give you credit for as much constancy on your side."

Regina thought and felt with him, but she was reserved in expressing her feelings.

As for poor Mrs. Willingham, her spirits went down at once and altogether. You would have thought she was coming out of a long and dangerous illness; she spent all her time, when alone, in poring over a large folding map of India that her son had brought her, — tracing over and over again the different names to which so terrible a notoriety had been recently given. Even the tender-hearted Mrs. Arnold, who, when she was in better circumstances, had been sought far and near as a comforter, broke her wand in despair, and trusted to time, as people do when they have nothing else to trust to. This distress was so new to Regina that she could hardly tell what she felt. She had yet to serve an apprenticeship to sorrow. She had lost her parents too early to grieve over their death. She had not experienced that worse absence, that restless daily loss which time has no power to alleviate, which those endure, whose dearest friends are stationed in a fatal climate. She did her best to animate and console Mrs. Willingham. She sympathized with her fully and freely; but she did not feel as

much, and that is the truth. She thought sincerely that nobody ever was so distressed as herself; but, after all, the love of kindred (where it is love and not the opposite) is the strongest of the affections.

But still she was very unhappy, and very much to be pitied. She gave Alban a long tress of her shining hair, and he gave her a ring, — an opal, which he pretended was a talisman, — and the nearer the time drew for his departure, the more she felt as if she could not live through the last few hours; the worst as all know who have gone through such a trial.

It was settled that they should all spend the last evening at Dykeham. Mrs. Arnold went early in the fly, leaving Alban and Regina to walk across the common at their leisure. The weather was mild and cloudy. They stood, arm-in-arm, looking at the trees before them, with very little idea of the beautiful effect of light and shade which they presented at that moment, but rather to prolong the time that they would pass together.

"I leave my mother in your care, Regina," he said at last; "you will be more to her than I could ever be."

"I will do my best, Alban," she returned; "you can hardly love her more than I do."

"When I write to her, you will understand that I am speaking to you in every line."

"Yes, she has promised that I shall see all your letters, and all her answers."

"You might write a few lines at the end of hers sometimes."

"If grandmamma allows it; but you know she is fastidious about our position. Still, if I do not write, I shall dictate. We shall hear constantly of each other."

"I should be glad if I could form an idea when I shall stand on this spot with you again, Regina. It is true there

is one event that would recall me at once,—I mean Sir Herbert's death."

"Oh, then, we wont look forward to it," cried Regina. "I could not bear to think of profiting by,—dear me! I hope that old man did not hear us. He passed quite close as you were speaking."

"That's the old man who lives on the common,—is it not?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Willingham thinks he has something to do with Sir Herbert,—that he was once in his service."

"Ah! however he could do me no harm, even if he were to repeat what I said. Sir Herbert would have every disposition to injure me, but it is not in his power."

"Perhaps we had better go on," said Regina; "Mrs. Willingham will not like to lose much of your company."

"Now," he said, pausing as they came up to the gate of the farm-house, "have we anything else to say?"

"No, I think not," she answered faintly.

He bent forward and kissed her gravely, and then led her into the house.

Regina had her share of sorrows in after life, but she always recollected that evening as the most especially wretched she could call to mind. She said, afterward, that the strain on her nerves made her feel ten years older. Even Alban, whose composure was wont to act upon her like a spell,—even his calmness was so visibly assumed, that she feared every minute it would be overthrown.

Once only he touched upon his destination, and then, to Regina's surprise, who gave up all for lost, his mother was able to command her feelings. He was sitting beside Regina, who was preparing the tea; and Mrs. Willingham, on the other side of the table, was looking at him, half unconsciously, with an expression of utter misery in her countenance.

"Ah! you are thinking of the Khyber Pass," he said,

wishing to rouse her from her depression ; " but we are going to change all that, like Molière's physician."

Mrs. Willingham rose up with a gasp, but she recovered herself as she came slowly across the room, and she replied, while she leaned on his shoulder, " No ; I was thinking that there was a window open behind my little Regina, and that it was not very safe after her walk."

" Don't shut it, pray !" exclaimed Regina, glad of a window to talk about. " I am so fond of air, and it is very close this evening."

" It is oppressive," sighed poor Mrs. Willingham. There was something to do while the tea-things were before her, and Regina was thankful for the occupation ; she dared not raise her eyes ; she felt as if each long minute would exhaust her courage. And very soon afterward Mrs. Arnold's fly was heard approaching.

" Going so early, my dear, dear friend ?" cried Mrs. Willingham, clinging to the old lady as if, while she remained, her son's departure were less near.

" Yes, my dear," she replied ; " these last hours belong to you alone ; and, for my little Regina, parting is as easy now as later, — easier, perhaps ; so God bless you both, and comfort you in these dark trials !"

" Oh, yes !" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham, with feverish haste. " Dear Mrs. Arnold, you have done me a great deal of good already. She was talking to me, Alban, before you came in ; and she said what is very true, — that, — that" —

And here poor Mrs. Willingham burst into a sudden paroxysm of hysterical weeping, and Regina, scarcely less agitated, threw herself into her arms.

" Now, my dear Alban," said Mrs. Arnold, taking him aside, " your mother will be better when alone. Bid farewell to my child, as friends who will rejoice to meet again, but who have no claim, no pledge, between them."

They clasped each other's hands, while their eyes met, expressing all the faith and constancy they were not allowed to put into words.

Which of them was the first to break that silent vow?

CHAPTER XIV.



VEN Mrs. Arnold could hardly understand her friend's passionate despair when her son was gone. All the agony which she had compressed within herself while he remained now seemed to defy restraint, and overwhelmed her like a sea. Her health was no longer strong enough to permit her to wrestle against her sorrow.

All that Regina's naturally hopeful temper could urge in behalf of Alban's safety, his success, his speedy return, she put aside by the single remark, —

"You, my love, can keep up, for you will see him again; I shall not! It is not his death that I see approaching; it is my own!"

In vain did Regina attempt to scare this phantom from her path; it soon became too evident to herself and her grand-mamma that Mrs. Willingham's strength was declining. Her spasms became more frequent and more alarming; and, as the autumn set in early and cold, a racking cough was added to her other ailments.

Mrs. Arnold much wished that she would take up her abode with them altogether at Holmwood; but this she declined.

"I am trouble enough to you, granny, as it is," she said; "and my little Regina turns as white as a sheet when the spasms come on. Invalids are better alone the greater part

of their time — though, if I grow much worse — I don't know — we shall see."

Mrs. Arnold had gone through it all before; she had watched the symptoms of decline in her own daughter. It opened a new scene to Regina, and she began to understand the heart-sickness of alternate hope and fear.

It was during the winter of that year that Mrs. Arnold received an unexpected bequest from a distant relative in France. The Count Du Quesnay, who was a Laval on his mother's side, bequeathed to Mrs. Arnold a property worth about eight hundred a year. This fortune, which, to the simple tastes of the old lady, appeared very ample, she determined to set apart for Regina, in order that there might be no pecuniary difficulties in the way of her marriage with Alban, as soon as he was able to return from India.

Regina was half afraid that Alban would think her too rich if she was endowed so splendidly; but Mrs. Willingham laughed her out of that notion.

"It will make very pretty pin-money for Lady Willingham, my love, and nothing more; and I advise you to have it all very closely tied up and settled on yourself, for there is no knowing how people may turn out. I am serious; he is very like his father about the nose!"

Alban wrote long letters at every possible opportunity; he knew that his mother would be interested by details, and he gave her minute accounts of everything that passed in which he took a share. Very few people in England possessed the knowledge of Indian affairs that Mrs. Willingham attained in the course of that winter. It was her daily solace to look over all her son's letters, even when they had swelled into a formidable collection, and to trace his progress on the map.

One cold morning Regina was walking across the common to pay her daily visit at Dykeham, for the fields were wet, and she was obliged to keep to the high-road, when a large

carriage rolled past her, in which to her surprise she beheld Mrs. Chillingworth and Miss Hopper, seated in close converse. Time had been when Winny thought it a great move to be taken out *riding*, as she called it, by Mrs. Ramsay; and her grandmother had had some difficulty in obtaining Mrs. Chillingworth's permission to introduce the grateful Winny to her at a Bible meeting held at Bradford. Then she had been asked to tea, when they were obliged to have a few people whom they looked down upon; and then she taught the children a new way of playing at dominos; and then they had her to dine when the Ramsays were asked, that she might be the recipient of all Mrs. Ramsay's tiresome boastings; and at last she had wriggled herself into a confidential intimacy with Mrs. Chillingworth, and of course looked into the hedge when they drew past Regina, that she might not be compelled to acknowledge her inferiors with a bow.

Regina had only just time to feel gratified that she was not obliged to speak to Miss Hopper when the carriage was suddenly checked, and Mrs. Chillingworth leaning out, said, —

“Ah! how are you, Regina? you are just the person I wanted to see; you can tell us where Mr. Brand is going.”

“Mr. Brand! I did not know he was going anywhere,” said Regina, looking surprised.

“Yes!” cried Winny, chinking up her eyes. “He has much to learn, poor young man. He cannot be brought to see with Mr. Morley on several great subjects, and he has got another curacy; but where is it?”

“I am sure I don't know,” answered Regina.

“Then you may depend on it he does not know himself,” remarked Mrs. Chillingworth; “for of course you would be the first to hear.”

“Unless they have quarrelled,” hinted Winny, looking very wise.

“You gave him to me, Miss Hopper,” said Regina; “you are quite at liberty to take him away again when you please.”

Mrs. Chillingworth finding that Regina knew nothing about it, gave orders to drive on, and Regina pursued her way not a little vexed at hearing that the only clergyman with whom they were on cordial terms was about to leave the parish. A little farther on she met Mr. Brand coming out of a cottage, and so very certain did she feel of her feelings toward him, and of his to her, that she had no hesitation at expressing her regret in the prospect of losing him.

"O Miss Howard!" said Mr. Brand, looking very much pleased, however; "but (I do not know who was your informant) I have no present intention of leaving Holmwood."

"Oh, that's well!—it was Winny, of course; but never mind!" exclaimed Regina.

Mr. Brand laughed, and went on: "It is possible that Miss Hopper may have heard whispers of a change in the church at Holmwood; but (I know I can trust you, Miss Howard) it is not I who am likely to leave—it is Mr. Morley. Three of his intimate friends have become converts to the Roman Catholic faith, and they have so worked upon him, that I believe in a very short time he will also make his profession. As I learn that my services are still required by his successor, I see no immediate prospect of my leaving this place."

"For which I am very glad, and for all the rest," cried Regina. "Will he be a monk? will he take orders? what will he do with his daughters? I think I should like him best as a Benedictine, or a Carmelite. Which is the strictest profession, Mr. Brand?"

"I am afraid, Miss Howard, that you will not have the gratification of hearing that he has taken the tonsure; it is said that a young lady of large fortune, whose views have gradually progressed with his own, until she has ended, as he has done, at Rome"—

"From Oxford to Rome, Mr. Brand!" said Regina, archly; "and the young lady's name is Miss Cutler, Mr.

Brand ; and she has fifty thousand pounds ; and Miss Hopper will be *disconsolate*, Mr. Brand, but not *inconsolable* ; I trust I need say no more."

"Now really, Miss Howard, you are too bad," he replied, laughing, as he took his leave.

Mrs. Arnold was so very much relieved by Mr. Morley's departure, which took place within a week after this conversation, that Regina told Mrs. Willingham privately, she could not bring herself to regret the cause of this effect ; or rather say, "the cause of this *de-fect* ;" which quotation Mrs. Willingham thought so witty, that, being then engaged in writing to Alban, she introduced it for his especial benefit.

And Mr. Brand, though he respected the sincerity of Mr. Morley's conduct, began to think you might have too much of a good thing ; and the candles disappeared from the altar, and the beadle was no longer directed to put water slyly into the aspensorium at the church door ; nay, he even discontinued the early service at a hint from his present rector, who thought it hardly worth while to open the church for the sake of two angry old women and the parish idiot, who had hitherto formed the sole congregation, led thither by the threats of Mr. Morley. The new rector went even farther, and preached in his black gown, partly because such had been the practice within the memory of man in this country, and partly because other changes of costume being recommended, and not followed even by the most zealous Puseyites, he did not see why he should wrong himself and others by doing things by halves.

And Regina performed her promise the very first Sunday Mr. Brand followed this example, and executed a sketch of him the next morning in his black robe going up the pulpit stairs ; but, being taken from behind, it was not so valuable to his friends as it might have been, since it only illustrated the back of his head, and the scroll of paper in his hand.

But Mrs. Willingham was delighted with it, and reproached her young friend for not having made such another clever sketch of Alban when he was so much there, — “So many opportunities as you had, naughty Regina! and, with your knack of seizing the expression of the figure, it was too bad.”

And then Regina felt shy, and did not tell Mrs. Willingham that she had made a sketch of Alban the very best she had ever done; and that she looked at it the last thing at night, and the first thing every morning, and that she never had courage to show it even to her grandmamma.

As the spring advanced, and it became only too clear that Mrs. Willingham was rapidly declining, a singular change took place in her own feelings. She became every day more sanguine of her recovery. Each symptom that spoke so plainly of decay to her experienced friend, she treated as accidental. Now, it was the east wind that had aggravated her cough; another time, an imprudent diet had brought on a severer fit of spasms. The doctor seriously advised that some one should write to her son, and she took this duty on herself, and wrote a laughing account of the fears her kind friends entertained for her health. Regina was sitting by her at the time, and she felt that Alban could come but to one conclusion on receiving that letter, — that his mother was particularly well, and that Mrs. Arnold was a very nervous old woman. So, after thinking over the subject a great deal, Regina took the law into her own hands, and the first time she was alone she sent Alban the following lines, remarkable only as being the first and last letter she ever addressed to a lover: —

“It is very painful to me to write to you on a subject that will give you much sorrow; but I am sure, if you knew how very weak my dear Mrs. Willingham has become lately, you would, if possible, return to England without delay. Her spirits are so good, owing, I think, to your cheering letters, that she will not believe

her strength is decreasing, and that we have reason for our deep anxiety. I am writing without the leave or knowledge of any one, just because I could not keep silent, and therefore you must not send me an answer; but, if you come, you will find me the same exactly as when you left. Ah, what would I give, that you could find all who are dear to you as little changed!

“REGINA HOWARD.”

And now they were come to May,—cruel, biting, noxious May,—whose chilling rains and piercing winds bring many a lingering illness to its close. Mrs. Willingham never left the house now; she rose late, and went to bed at twilight. A regular nurse sat with her through the night, and she was obliged to take opiates to secure her any sleep.

Mrs. Arnold and Regina divided the day between them at Dykeham,—the old lady sitting with the invalid through the morning, and Regina passing the evening with her from her early tea till she was settled for the night. The afternoon she always insisted on passing by herself.

How much Regina had to tell her grandmother after their few hours' separation,—how much variety of pain to comment upon, and learn how to alleviate! for Mrs. Arnold was suggestive in a sick-room, and without that quality people are better away. But no amount of kind sympathy or ready invention could long avail their patient; it was evident that she was sinking fast. She gladly welcomed the visits of Mr. Carter, the rector of Dykeham, and received the sacrament at his hands; remarking that, until she could go to church again, it was a great comfort to her to have the services performed at home; but it did not strike her, as it did Mrs. Arnold and Regina, who were with her, that the time would never come that she would enter a church again.

At last, toward the end of May, one morning that Regina was expecting Mrs. Arnold back to dinner, there came a slip of paper from that lady to say, that her dear friend

was so much worse as to induce her to remain, at least during the day, and promising to let Regina know every few hours how the invalid was going on. But the idea of waiting at Holmwood, — waiting from hour to hour, with a sinking heart, — was intolerable to Regina; in a few minutes she was standing, breathless and tearful, in the porch of Dykeham farm.

Mrs. King came out, with the corner of her apron up, ready for a cry.

"O miss! she be very bad, poor dear lady! Dr. Athwood, he says he hardly thinks she will last through the night, — the spasms has been awful!"

Regina leant against the porch, sick with fear; even love will not cast out that ghastly dread, — the first interview with the destroying angel, — the horror of a great darkness that weighs on the spirit in the presence of death.

"Ha! miss, you run so fast you're out of breath," said the good woman, wiping the cold dew from Regina's forehead; "but don't take on, — there's a dear; it's what we must all come to."

Regina felt she had not come there to "take on;" she raised her head from good Mrs. King's shoulder, pressed her hand, and passed at once into Mrs. Willingham's room.

She was in bed, — still beautiful, though very thin, — propped up high with pillows. Since she had become worse, she had had her bed moved into her sitting-room, that she might have about her all her favorite pursuits.

"My little Regina," she said, holding out her hand with an altered look and voice, "I was longing to see you. You will tell my Alban that I was very happy; and your love will console him for my loss."

"I am come to sit with you and grandmamma," said Regina, trying to be composed; "and I will say all you wish, and do all I can for Alban."

"He will feel it very much when he comes back," she

went on; "but he will not show it; he shows nothing almost of his heart; but I think he feels the more. It is bad to bleed inwardly."

"I will try to understand him as you have done," said Regina.

Mrs. Arnold, who was reading at intervals, at her friend's request, from the Bible, now began in her silver voice to repeat the twenty-third Psalm; while the invalid lay tranquilly listening, and Regina leaned against the pillow, and tried to still her sobs, and her beating pulses, and the trembling in her limbs.

Later in the day the doctor came, and said that he was glad to find his patient so much more comfortable; and, having nothing else to say, — for he knew pretty well what that sudden ease portended, — took his leave, and returned to Bradford. And the two friends watched sadly but hopefully at the bedside, where she lay very calm, without suffering, and half asleep, until evening. Then she grew more wakeful, and insisted that Mrs. Arnold should not sit up any longer.

"I will have granny go to bed," she said. "I can send for her if I grow worse; but my little Regina I should like to keep, for she seems to me like a part of Alban."

At Mrs. Arnold's age it is a serious thing to lose a night's rest; and, seeing her friend so refreshed and calm, seeing her stronger too, — for she had just been raised up to take a little tea, — she bade her affectionately good-night, and went to the room that was prepared for her.

The nurse had come, and was slumbering by the small fire that was kindled for the night, though the evening was warm, and the casement window set half open. Mrs. Willingham had been sorting and arranging a bundle of her son's letters, and had fallen into a doze during the occupation. Regina tied the papers together, and laid them beside her friend. While she was so occupied, her thoughts wandered back to

that evening, two years ago, when she had stood singing with Mrs. Willingham at the piano, and Alban played at chess with Mrs. Arnold at the table near. She remembered their panic as the blind was stirred by the mysterious hand outside; and this memory, with the mournful voice of the hoot-owl in the Dingleby woods made her shiver with a sudden fear.

"Regina!"

Some one uttered her name in a tone of such mortal anguish that her heart stood still. She turned quickly to the bed. Mrs. Willingham was sleeping calmly. A sharp rustle made her look toward the window; the blind was thrust aside, and a haggard face leaned in, while again the word "Regina!" came trembling like a pang from his lips.

Fear made Regina bold; she walked swiftly to the window, and said in a firm, low tone, "There is a sick lady here; she is sleeping just now, and I am sure you would not wish to disturb what may be her last hours!"

"O God, do not abandon me! Leave me this one love, this one hatred of my life!" he cried, stretching his wasted hands into the room. "Let me in for pity's sake; let me kneel by her side, once more — once more!"

"I do not know what to do!" cried Regina, much agitated; "indeed, I believe Mrs. Willingham is dying."

"I know it — I know every passage in her life. Open to me, for the love of Heaven! I am he whose life she has drained by inches, — I am Herbert Willingham!"

"Oh, then, pray do not come in, — do not agitate her last moments with regrets that now can avail nothing!" pleaded Regina.

"Regrets! Has not her whole life been one fierce atonement?" he cried. "I come to pardon. Let me in."

"Regina, my love," said Mrs. Willingham's feeble voice. She was awake, and struggling to sit up.

"I was speaking to a friend who came to inquire after you," whispered Regina, leaning over her.

"Yes — I know — let him come in, and bid me farewell," she said distinctly.

Regina went in the chill and darkness along the passage, and unbarred the large hall-door. The moment it swung back, he rushed in like a madman, — indeed, she feared he was mad, — and hurried with her to the bedside of his early love.

"Oh, live — live!" he groaned, suddenly falling on his knees, as if the springs of life had given way at once.

She turned her eyes upon him, and smiled a little. Regina, standing by her pillow, wrapped in her long white shawl, was shivering with excitement and cold.

"We are at peace, Regina!" he exclaimed, stretching his clasped hands toward her, — "at peace after all these stormy years; there is forgiveness between us at last."

Mrs. Willingham's eyes were half closed, her breathing slower.

"Perfect remission and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord," she whispered, after a pause, her mind reverting to the last prayer she had used before she slept.

"Is there — is there *nothing* you can ask me now?" he asked, in a tone of agony.

Her hand strayed to the packet of letters, — her lips seemed to frame the words, "My son!"

"*His* son! no matter — I will do him right! I had done him a great wrong. I had thought of this before — I can with your help — shall it be so?" he asked, turning round and grasping Regina's dress.

"Oh, yes, yes!" she faltered through her tears, not knowing what he meant, but wishing only to make him calmer, for the sake of her dying friend.

"Regina, do you know me? do you know who kneels beside you?" he cried, appealing to the placid face before him.

"Did you ever, *ever* shed a tear for *me* among your sorrows? Did you ever wish that fatal act undone, or think I should have loved you better than that wretch? I have yearned to ask this of you many hopeless years; and now — and now I come and ask it of your corpse!"

There was a pause,—a stillness. The half-closed lids were fixed,—the parted lips were breathless evermore.

"Yes, of her corpse!" the wretched man fell prostrate on the ground, and wept, not like a child,—like a vexed spirit, like a stormy sea, like the rending of winds among the winter trees.

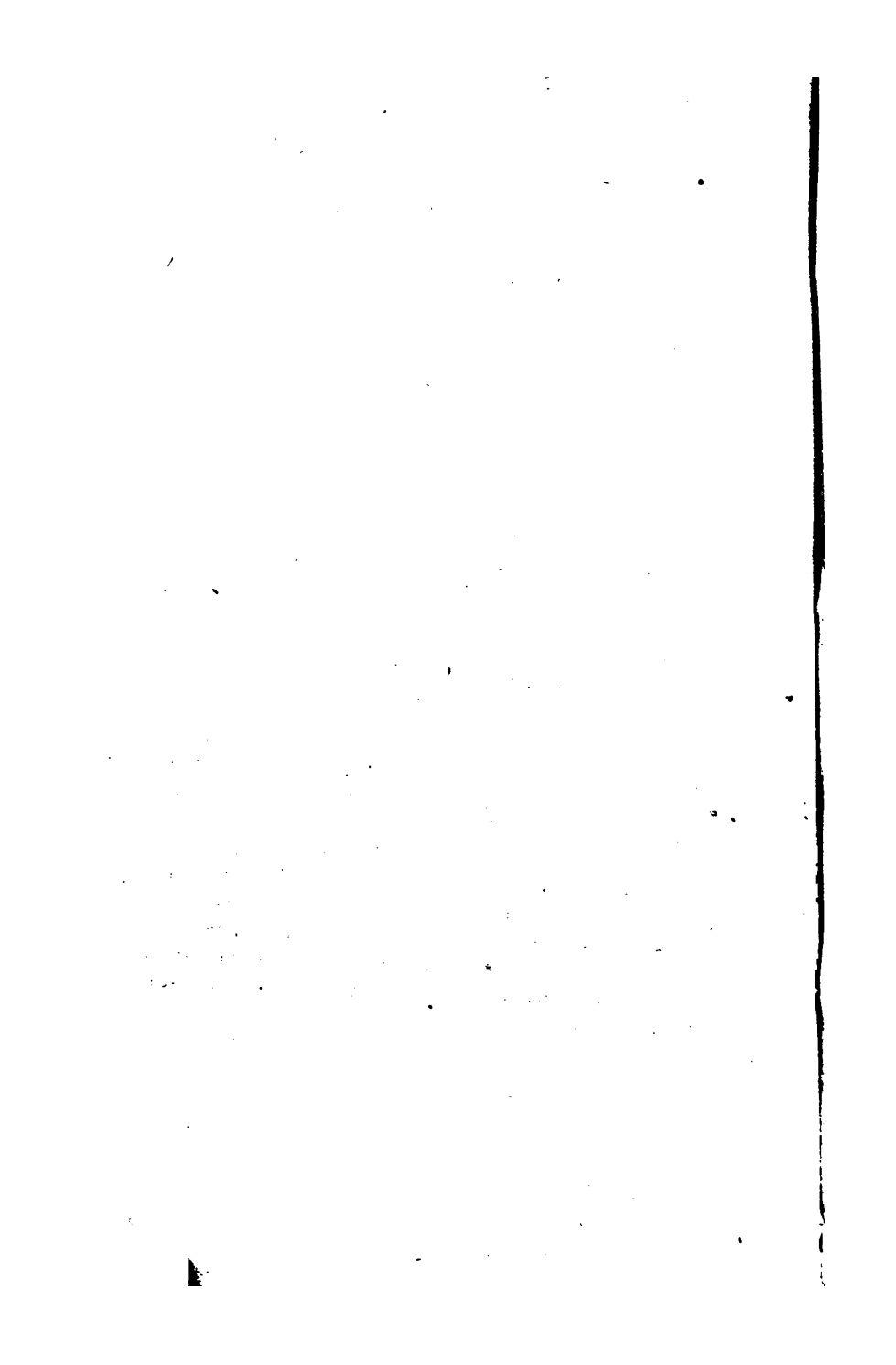
"Nurse!" cried Regina, in a sharp voice, that startled her own ears.

The old woman hurried up to the bed.

"Sure enough, dear heart! she went off like a lamb," said the nurse, and leaned over to close her eyes, while Regina and Sir Herbert knelt side by side in prayer.

When Mrs. Arnold came in at daybreak, Sir Herbert was gone, and she would have been almost inclined to ascribe the story of his appearance to the overstrained nerves of her child, but for the repeated assurances of the nurse, that a strange gentleman had come and gone "like a flash of lightning," and had seemed much more distressed even than Miss Regina.

And some days afterwards, when, at the simple funeral of Mrs. Willingham, Regina assumed the post of her absent son, and followed her to the grave, she was met at the church-yard gate by the same haggard figure, aged even since their last meeting; and they once more stood side by side, while they gazed on the quieter and narrower bed in which their friend was now laid to rest.



BEYMINSTRE.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.



It was the last day of the year. Mrs. Arnold and Regina had travelled about England during the summer and autumn, and had returned to Holmwood a few days before Christmas. It was a damp, rainy day, such as always hung heavy on Regina's spirits. Her thoughts were then apt to revert to Alban, and she wondered why he had never written to her grandmamma since he replied to the letter in which she had announced to him his mother's death. His answer had consisted of a few lines only, expressing in strong and earnest terms his gratitude to Mrs. Arnold and Regina for their devoted care of his mother; but contained no allusion to his own feelings, whether of present sorrows or future hopes. It was dated from the camp, on the eve of one of our great victories in Scinde.

"I do think, grandmamma, he might have written," said Regina, pausing in her work, "after such a battle! He knew how anxious we should be."

"I did not expect it, my child; he has no plea; the papers told us all that he could, — all that he *would*, I am sure. He is not expansive, I am convinced, even when not under the pressure of immediate sorrow."

Mrs. Arnold sat thoughtful ; she was turning over in her mind whether she had done wisely to prevent an engagement. Regina's feelings *were* involved. Of what use was it, then, to leave her unfettered ? She had to recall all the arguments she had then employed to Mrs. Willingham before she could assure herself she had done right.

"A gentleman wanting to see Miss Howard," said Marianne, opening the door.

"Alban !" whispered Regina, as her grandmamma took up the card.

"Mr. Reynard ! Beg him to walk upstairs," said the old lady.

A sallow, middle-aged man, with the eye of a serpent, stood in the doorway, and begged in a bland voice to know which of the two ladies before him was Miss Howard.

Mrs. Arnold set him right on this dubious point, and begged him to be seated.

He observed very mildly that he had been the solicitor of the late Sir Herbert Willingham, and inclined his head gently toward Regina as he spoke.

"The *late* Sir Herbert ! Is he then dead ? Poor man !" and her thoughts instantly turned upon Sir Alban Willingham, of Beyminstre, with a flash of triumph, — Alban, whose wishes were fulfilled at last ; a noble fortune, a lofty position in the country, an undoubted right to both in his ancestral name, — and not a pang of regret ; for he had not loved, not known the dead, — not so much as she had ; yet the poor broken-hearted old man came before her, and her eyes filled with tears.

"The last time I saw Sir Herbert was at the grave of a very dear friend. I don't know what I am crying for," she said in her natural way, as she dashed away her tears.

"Such emotion is highly creditable to both parties," said the lawyer ; "but I will, if you please, proceed to explain the motive for my visit. I must premise that, from the date

of that lady's death (to whom, I believe, Miss Howard, you alluded), Sir Herbert gradually declined, and died, one week ago. His will was opened yesterday. You are probably aware of his fortune and estate; but it may surprise you a little when I inform you that he has bequeathed all of which he died possessed, without any reservation, to yourself, Regina Howard, of Holmwood, in the county of Kent."

"No, no!" cried Regina, starting from her chair with a look of horror. "No! his nephew, Sir Alban Willingham, is his heir. He cannot leave it away; it is entailed, — I have often been told so! Grandmamma, tell him! speak! I will take nothing."

"Indeed, Mr. Reynard, I think you will find it so," said Mrs. Arnold, gently. "We were acquainted with Mr. Willingham from our great intimacy with his mother; we have therefore heard his future prospects mentioned as beyond a doubt. Sir Herbert was very eccentric; but he has doubtless, in this bequest, exceeded his own powers. You know better than I the laws of entail. But I trust Sir Alban will soon be in the country to defend his own rights. Believe me, they shall meet with no opposition on our side."

"Madam," said the lawyer, "the entail was cut off six-and-twenty years ago, — before the birth of the present Sir Alban. Perhaps you know the outline of Sir Herbert's history. You are aware of the terms on which he stood with his brother. The colonel behaved very ill, certainly. He tried to take out a commission of lunacy against Sir Herbert; and then his marriage, — a proceeding that was hardly justifiable, I should say; but he has behaved worse than all to his son. He signed away his chance of the estate for the sum of fifty thousand pounds, which he scattered to the winds in less than two years."

Regina had dropped on the sofa like a wounded bird, and was gazing restlessly about, uncertain what to do.

"This has been kept a profound secret until now," pursued

the lawyer. "The colonel, fearing the effects of such knowledge on his creditors when the money should be spent, exacted from his brother a promise of secrecy during his life. Sir Herbert was willing to give it; his only object, that of dispossessing the children of his brother and the lady who had deceived him, was equally answered, without his feeling compelled to enter the marriage state, — against which his early disappointment had given him a decided objection. So that you, Miss Howard, are the possessor of Beyminstre, with a rent-roll of fourteen thousand a year. Allow me to offer you my congratulations."

"Grandmamma," faltered Regina, "this cannot be! I must get rid of this in some way; a great injustice has been done!"

"Perhaps, sir," said Mrs. Arnold, "you will allow us to apply to you professionally respecting the forms necessary to be gone through to transfer this property to the heir-at-law. As you must be intimately acquainted with the affairs of the late Sir Herbert, we could not put our case, I am sure, in better hands."

"I cannot but admire such great delicacy of feeling," said the lawyer; "but while Miss Howard continues a minor, I believe she can do nothing in the matter; and there are conditions in the will which I think would make it difficult at any future time. But one of my duties remains yet to be fulfilled; I am to put into Miss Howard's hands a letter addressed to her by the late Sir Herbert, found in his writing-desk after his decease."

"I should be glad if you would favor us with another visit to-morrow," said Mrs. Arnold, as Regina took the letter. "My grand-daughter is not very strong, and this intelligence has painfully affected her; and there is much yet to be discussed between us, in which I hope you will kindly give us the benefit of your advice."

"I trust that letter will entirely do away with your scru-

ples," said the lawyer, bowing himself to the door ; " I shall have the honor, madam, of waiting upon you to-morrow."

" Don't trust him, granny ! don't ask his advice !" cried Regina, violently agitated. " I hate him, with his serpent eyes ! Perhaps there is no will, after all !"

" My dearest child, be patient ; read your letter," said Mrs. Arnold, soothingly.

Regina tore it open. It was dated the day of Mrs. Wilingham's funeral. It contained these words : —

" On this day many years ago, Regina, the pale woman, whom you and I have followed to her grave, was lost to me forever by a sharper stroke than death. I loved her as I trust, for your sake, you may never love any human being. Her face haunted me like a vision ; her voice rang in my ears sleeping or waking ; her silvery farewell filled the air till we met again. If to have one intense prevailing idea and perception is madness, I was, and still am, mad ! From the hour I first saw her, she filled my whole being with one grave charm. I thought she loved me, and I went a journey on some pressing business with as firm a trust in her as in Heaven's mercy ! I was recalled by a letter that informed me she had eloped with my brother. I will not speak of the early days after my trial, — I dare not think much of that time ; but afterwards, when my hatred was still living, my revenge not cooled, I made a vow that no child of theirs should ever inherit Beyminstre, — should ever sit beside that hearth whose light she had extinguished. The husband was soon in great need ; for a large sum, and under a pledge of secrecy, he agreed to cut off the entail, and Beyminstre was at last my own. I knew that, not even to close its doors against them and theirs, could I ever bring a bride across that threshold ; but now it was mine, and I could leave it to an hospital. Well, when she was alone and poor, and was come to Holmwood, and time had softened but not healed my wound, I began to repent of my oath ; and then, Regina, by degrees it came into my mind, that I could restore through you what I had sworn I never would bestow on her son. I saw you loved each other, — do you not ? — yet I would not bind you. If he should prove like his father, or if your regard be less than I sup-

pose, take freely what I give, and use it as you will. But I am not in error here; you promised, as we knelt beside his dying mother, that you would aid me in my task. I call upon your help. Let my last act, through you, prove my forgiveness.

“HERBERT WILLINGHAM.”

“How little he knew Alban!” Regina exclaimed. “If anything in the world could alienate him from me, it is this! To receive his rightful inheritance at the hands of any living being, he never will bear it; he never will look upon me with the same feelings again!”

“My dear child, if Alban is generous, he will surely accept at your hands what you would have taken at his. He will feel sure that it is by no effort, no trickery, that you become possessed of his estate.”

“But will you write to him, granny, and tell him that I am trying to get rid of it before I come of age; and that if I cannot, — if he *must* wait till then, — that is, if no other plan occurs to him, — O granny!” said Regina, bursting into tears, “but for this, he would not need to be reminded of the terms on which we stood.”

“My little Regina, we must first learn whether you can *ever* resign it; if not, he must submit to take you with the property, as Sir Herbert proposes.”

“O granny! that is what his pride will never stoop to do.”

“My dear child, if he loves you as I believe, his pride must accommodate to circumstances. But there is another point to be considered, my Regina. Absence may have weakened in him those feelings, which nothing has occurred to efface in your mind, and then I feel assured that, not even for the sake of Beyminstre, would he come forward to claim your hand.”

“O granny! that may well be,” cried Regina, hiding her face in her hands.

“In that case, my child, it would be awkward to *offer* the

estate ; it would be inviting a refusal. Should he return to England, and make no advances toward renewing your acquaintance, it will then be better that you wait quietly until you are able to transfer the property to him ; and then do it, without any reference to his wishes, through the hands of a lawyer. But, on his return, he can hardly avoid paying a visit to the friends who closed the eyes of his mother ; and then, I do not, my little Regina, anticipate a very long estrangement between you."

"But could not you write to him, granny, just to say that we regret the bequest, and are doing all in our power to restore it?"

"My dear, reflect. He may say, 'These are words ; in three years your mind may alter, — you may marry, and your husband may insist on retaining Beyminstre.' This is not what I think, but what he may say."

"But still to sit down quiet, and let him imagine" —

"My love, what can he imagine of you that is to your disadvantage? He ought to know you well. Let this be a test of his love, of his esteem. Better a thousand-fold, my Regina, lose him now, than find out, too late, that his heart was not large enough for faith, nor for that greater generosity which consists, not in *giving*, but in *receiving* gracefully."

"I accept the trial, dearest granny," said Regina ; "I too will have faith in Alban. He will be very much annoyed and mortified at first, but he will come home one day, and ask me if I am still in the same mind, and Beyminstre will be quite a secondary consideration with both of us ; it will not matter who first had it."

CHAPTER II.



HE lawyer came the next morning, and gave them several details respecting Sir Herbert's life. He had, as Regina suspected, been a frequent visitor at the house on the common, in which he had placed his old servant, on the understanding that he should find a home there, whenever it suited him to leave his own neighborhood, for the sake of a more absolute seclusion than he could obtain at Beyminstre. That Mrs. Willingham should have sought a refuge at Holmwood, was one of those strange coincidences which so often astonish us in real life.

Mrs. Arnold, with Lord Oswestry, a near relation of Sir Herbert, were named Regina's guardians till she came of age, or married. As the earl was not now in England, Mr. Reynard had sent to apprise him of the fact; and in the mean time Mrs. Arnold was fully competent to arrange all that was necessary at present. Fifteen hundred a year was suggested by Lord Oswestry's solicitor, in concert with Mr. Reynard, as an allowance for Miss Howard during her minority, and this Mrs. Arnold readily accepted. "We will not touch it, my Regina," she said; "it may lie at the banker's; and, when you restore the estate, you can also give that back, or lay it out in improvements at Beyminstre."

"I shall never, never live there, granny!" cried Regina.

Mr. Reynard, on his next visit, thought it very uncertain that the transfer could be accomplished; there was a clause in the will relating to Regina's children, which could not, he thought, be got over.

"But if I do not marry?" asked Regina, eagerly.

"Then the estate, at your death, can be bequeathed to whom you please; that is stipulated."

“But why can I not now, immediately, enter into an agreement to give it up, and remain always single?”

The lawyer with a smile remarked, that such a step would be attended with some objections, and that, at any rate, she had three years before her during which nothing could be done. Even Mrs. Arnold seemed to think this rather a strong measure. She thought, what Regina could not then believe, that, if Alban was alienated from her, it might occur as a possibility, in after years, that she might form another attachment. And now Regina began to learn by experience what “the law’s delay” meant in Hamlet’s use of the term — namely, as a very strong inducement to commit suicide; and a great improvement in savage cruelty upon any of the quaint devices of a ruder age.

Sometimes Mr. Reynard was quite sure that the transfer could be accomplished easily to-morrow or next day; and he consulted some great authority, for which Mrs. Arnold had to pay a round sum of money, and the oracle had declared that there was not the slightest impediment to Miss Howard presenting it to, say the Duke of Wellington, or the Foundling Hospital, or anything or body in the world; and therefore, if she was in earnest, he would put the proper documents in hand at once.

And when Regina, all joy and gratitude, gave him every assurance that she meant what she said, the next thing was a large letter (also very expensive), which informed her that the advice of another oracle had been taken, and that the last oracle had said that it was an utter impossibility for Miss Howard to dispossess herself of Beyminstre, and that, if it did not descend to her children by reason of her having none, it must go to her heir-at-law, and who that would turn out to be, she knew as much as Mr. Reynard; for she had none but very distant relations and this sort of thing went on for nearly two years, fretting and harassing her worse than sickness, and sometimes causing her some

astonishment that Mr. Reynard, who had made the will, knew so little what it meant, and was constantly going about to all the cleverest counsel in town, entreating them (at Mrs. Arnold's expense) to explain to him what he had written himself.

And now the war in India had been brought to a brilliant conclusion. Regina had followed, step by step, the route of the conquering army, with a feverish, tearful eagerness that did no good to her health.

At last a paper mentioned that Sir Alban Willingham was on his way to Egypt on sick leave, in consequence of a neglected wound, and the editor trusted that the sea-voyage might restore the health of so promising an officer, who had distinguished himself at the battle of Sobraon, and in an affair at a hill fort with a bewildering name.

Regina now broke down altogether. The idea of Alban sick, disappointed, friendless, — now that his mother was dead, and she estranged from him, — overwhelmed her. Her spirit would have carried her through a great deal, but her health would not.

People began to say, that she looked as if she would not long enjoy the great fortune she had come into: as if she had enjoyed it hitherto.

So that Mrs. Arnold, at her wits' end, thought she would write to Alban; anything that might elicit some reply, instead of keeping up this strange prolonged silence; but this was a very difficult undertaking, for the lawyers seemed now quite agreed that Regina could not, during her lifetime, transfer the estate to the heir-at-law; still it was to make Regina more tranquil, and she wrote: —

“I have been hitherto fearful lest you should mistake my motive in writing to you. I am now more fearful that you may mistake my silence. You may think my grandchild accepts the strange bequest of your relative, and perhaps rejoices in her good fortune. It is

due to both of you to say, that she has been incessantly occupied, since the day when the news reached her, in trying to relinquish the estate; and that the lawyers' decision, that this cannot be done during her lifetime, has very seriously affected her health.

"It will not surprise you that I should feel a deep interest in the son of my very dear lost friend; I have traced that portion of your career which the papers have recorded, with much anxiety and a little pride; and it will always be a pleasure to me to hear of your welfare, though I may not live to take you by the hand again. — Your sincere friend,

"REGINA ARNOLD (NÉE DE LAVAL)."

"I should have liked to seal it with that pretty ring his dear mother gave me," said Mrs. Arnold, as she concluded her letter; "but I have mislaid it somewhere."

"And I am afraid that I am the culprit," said Regina. "The last time Winny Hopper called, I had borrowed it of you, and was sealing with it. I remember I would not give it back lest she should make some remark, and ask to see it."

"Ay, I recollect, my love; it will turn up one day when we least expect it."

Regina's spirits rose at once. She took the letter to the post herself with an eagerness that she had not known for a long time. She returned to the house quite gay; and found Mr. Brand sitting with her grandmamma.

He did not come to see them so often as he used to do; quite as friendly to Regina; quite as respectful to Mrs. Arnold when they did meet, they each had new avocations which tended to keep them apart. The new rector was a non-resident, and the care of a straggling parish devolved entirely upon Mr. Brand. And, since this unlucky bequest, Mrs. Arnold had spent a good deal of time in London, — partly to be near her legal advisers, but more that she might afford Regina the advantage and the distraction of masters, both in music and painting; and the still greater improvement of hearing the first performers, and studying the master-

pieces of art. And she was glad to withdraw her grandchild as much as possible from a neighborhood which now sought to overwhelm her with attentions, that had their origin in her accession of fortune, and that would subside as quickly if she succeeded in renouncing the estate.

But Mr. Brand had still another motive to render his visits less frequent. Ever since Mrs. Arnold's increase of property, he had made the discovery that he was attached to Regina. He had always admired and liked her extremely; but he was not able to marry, and he thought his feelings quite under his control. And it may be observed, that he shewed himself very unlike the average of his sex, in paying no more serious attention to Regina than he had done before. He had delicacy enough to refrain from making overtures to her prospects, which he had not thought it worth while to do when she was comparatively poor.

"And how has Miss Howard been this long time?" asked Mr. Brand, as he rose to meet her.

"Quite well," said Regina, cheerfully, as she took her seat by Mrs. Arnold.

"Really, Mrs. Arnold," he remarked in a low tone, "I never saw Miss Howard looking better."

"What! has grandmamma been complaining of me?" inquired Regina affectionately; "she is too anxious."

"Not without reason," said the old lady; "I don't like my child to grow so thin, or to look so transparent as she still does."

"Is that study, Miss Howard?"

"No, — lawyers," said Regina.

"A very harassing complaint," Mr. Brand remarked.

"If all the lawyers were burnt, would anybody be sorry?" asked Regina.

"I have a brother a barrister," returned Mr. Brand.

"That's different, — I meant solicitors," cried Regina.

"Their solicitations are something like those of the rob-

ber in Gil Blas," said Mr. Brand, laughing, "who asked alms with a loaded carbine pointed through the hedge."

"They are a necessary evil," urged Mrs. Arnold.

"But are you really so much plagued?" asked Mr. Brand, in a tone of interest.

"Infinitely!" said Regina.

"It does seem so very hard," remarked Mrs. Arnold, "that people cannot give up a bequest."

"I cannot believe in such a case," said Mr. Brand.

"Look at me, then, Mr. Brand," interposed Regina. "I suppose that seeing is believing."

"Then, Miss Howard, I am reduced to the necessity of not believing in your solicitor."

"I wish we knew where to turn," said Mrs. Arnold.

Mr. Brand hesitated.

"Help us, Mr. Brand," cried Regina; "I am sure you are thinking of some one."

"I was thinking that I should like to consult my brother," he said. "I may be partial, but he seems to me to have a clear head."

"And I leave you to judge the clearness of Mr. Reynard's head," interposed Regina, "when he has written at least eighty-three letters to grandmamma on this subject, and no two alike."

"I really should be very grateful to you, Mr. Brand," added Mrs. Arnold; "if we could see a chance of succeeding, it would do Regina more good than all the doctors in the world."

"I must be going to town shortly," remarked Mr. Brand; "I shall then be staying with my brother, and at least can hear what he thinks on the subject."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Brand!" cried Regina; "I am sure your brother must be clever. You don't know how grateful I am."

And as she met his eyes, fixed on her with a peculiar

expression which she did not know how to interpret, but which she took for surprise at the implied compliment, she added hastily, speaking, as she always did, from the impulse of the moment, —

“Why, do you think I am insensible to your acquirements, and indifferent to your beautiful sermons, because I don’t follow you all across the common, mewing like,—well, grandmamma,—like a lady of our acquaintance? I do think that your brother is likely to be a superior man.”

“I cannot help it, Mrs. Arnold,” pleaded Mr. Brand; “I must laugh,—I know who Miss Howard means; but I cannot tell her how much I value her good opinion.”

As soon as he had taken his leave, Mrs. Arnold said to her grandchild, —

“Now, my Regina, I know you will answer me with candor. Have you any reason to think that Mr. Brand is attached to you?”

“Not the least, granny,” cried Regina; “I cannot think what makes people so silly. To be sure, Miss Hopper is silly to begin with,—but really, people like Mrs. Ramsay to suppose that he had an idea of me! He never in his life said anything grave, anything earnest, to me. We have talked and laughed, as we do now, ever since he first came to Holmwood. It seems to me so very natural to like an intelligent person without loving him. That is what I feel toward him, and what I am sure he feels toward me.”

“Then I have no occasion to alter a little arrangement I have made,” said Mrs. Arnold, half to herself.

“About the school? no, granny. I have grown very charming of late; but I can meet Mr. Brand every Wednesday at the Bible class, without endangering his peace.”

Mrs. Arnold smiled, and kissed her.

“I am so glad you have written to Alban,” continued Regina; “he can never now plead ignorance of our in-

tentions ; he may be indifferent, but he cannot mistake me. My pride is at rest now."

"I think, my love, we shall hear from him in reply ; he can hardly avoid that."

"I anticipate so much from Mr. Brand's brother," said Regina. "I dare say it is all very simple, and that I can shake off Beyminstre 'like a dewdrop from a lion's mane,' when I get into honest hands !"

"My dearest, we know nothing against Mr. Reynard."

"Except his eyes, granny !"

"Silly child !"

"I am not on terms with Alban, granny, at present. No, no ! But if he writes a very affectionate letter to you, perhaps I may think better of him."

"I should not wonder, little Regina."

"He certainly is very superior to the people in this neighborhood."

"I think so, my love."

"His mother used to praise his temper very much."

"It is not temper, my Regina, that I fear in him ; the evil lies deeper than that, — it is pride."

"And if he is proud, I can tell him one thing, — that he will not bend *me* !" cried Regina ; "and I should like to see how foolish he will look when I coolly hand over the property to him some fine day, and then as coolly wish him good-morning !"

"My little Regina will not do that," said Mrs. Arnold, embracing her as they parted for the night ; "she will think of her grandmamma, and be very gentle."

One morning, two or three days after this conversation, as Regina was dressing, she accidentally shook the missing ring out of a corner of her workbox, in which she was searching for a pair of scissors. Delighted at its recovery, she hurried from her room into Mrs. Arnold's to restore it to her at once. Her grandmother was not yet stirring, and she

parted the curtains, surprised that she should be asleep at that hour, for she was remarkable as an early riser. A beautiful waxen image lay on the pillow, — a breathless, quiet image of eternal rest!

And Regina was alone in the world.

CHAPTER III.



It is an early October twilight. The organ is pealing softly in Mr. Winter's music-room, and the young voices of the school-children are chanting the *Te Deum*. The door of Regina's sitting-room is half open, and she reclines by the dim wood-fire listening, soothed by the religious strain.

It is three months since Mrs. Arnold's death, and she has been living ever since with the Winters. Good Mrs. Winter, who had never left her own house, except to go to church, for thirty years, took a post chaise (still procurable at Bradford), and was on her road to Holmwood within five minutes after she heard of the death of her revered old friend.

She remained with Regina the week before the funeral, doing everything that the warmest heart in the world could suggest for her comfort, and leaving everything at Prior-street to go to wreck and ruin, as she firmly believed, without a sigh.

She had insisted on Regina occupying rooms at her house apart from the family, "till she could turn herself round," as she expressed herself; and the poor girl thankfully availed herself of such a refuge. The very evening of the funeral, Mrs. Winter took her home; so that the next morning, when

Mrs. Chillingworth and Mrs. Ramsay, both arrived at Holmwood with the same intention, — to offer a home and a husband to the great heiress, — they found the shutters still closed, and were informed by Becky that Miss Howard was gone to live with Mrs. Winter.

And now Regina is leaning back in her chair, dreamily gazing, through the open door of the music-room, at the wax lights on either side of the organ, and the gentle, earnest, old musician bending over the keys, and the clean, fresh-colored children standing in two lines (*soprani* and *alti*, Mr. Winter calls them), at his right and left hand, the bright, short hair and uplifted faces of those nearest the light illumined with a halo that fades away into shadow at the termination of the class.

But soon the deep throbbing notes of the organ were mingled with sounds not quite so harmonious; and Mrs. Winter came puffing upstairs, followed by a maid-servant bearing a lamp.

"Mr. Brand come to wait upon you, my dear," she said; and turning to the stair-head, so that her remark might not be lost, added, "and I hope he is not going to bother you about business; for a poor thing that can hardly eat a bit of dinner is not fit, I am sure, to be worried with a heap of law-papers."

"I promise you, Mrs. Winter," said Mr. Brand, who was by this time acquainted with the strange old woman; for Mrs. Arnold had appointed him Miss Howard's guardian (to the property *she* had to leave), and this was not the first visit he paid in Prior-street, "I promise you that I mean nothing of the kind: I am quite unprovided with law-papers."

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Brand," said Regina, half rising to greet him; "I have been wishing to ask if you have done anything about that miserable Beyminstre estate."

"Not yet, Miss Howard. It will be better that you should

mention your wishes in the first place to Lord Oswestry: he is now your only guardian in reference to that property."

"True! yet it must be a matter of perfect indifference to him. I don't think I could find courage to write to him on the subject. Oh! I have not told you that I received a very polite letter from him yesterday, inviting me to pass the remainder of my minority under his roof. He says, they are returning to England in a few weeks."

"I think you could not do better. It will be a good introduction into the kind of society with which you have a claim to associate; and I am rather glad of this upon other grounds."

"You make me curious."

"I am constantly assailed by Mrs. Chillingworth and Mrs. Ramsay for permitting you to reside with these good Winters."

"But why, Mr. Brand?"

"Mrs. Chillingworth urges her connection with your family as an unanswerable reason for your spending your minority with her."

"She never thought of that before," interposed Regina.

"And therefore it is very natural that you should not think of it now," Mr. Brand remarked.

"And Mrs. Ramsay, who is *not* related to me?"

"She pleads the importance of your being removed from a family in which—you must pardon me, Miss Howard"—

"To be sure, — well?"

"In which, she says, you have something of an undesirable engagement with one of the sons."

"Well—I think I do recollect Winny Hopper saying that I was partial to Mr. Richard Winter," she remarked carelessly.

Mr. Brand saw that she did not even think the report worth contradicting, and he went on.

"Both these ladies are very anxious to see you, and talk it over with you. They seemed to think that I had something to do with your seclusion, and told me that it was

clearly my duty to allow your *real* well-wishers to come to the speech of you."

"Sometimes I wish that it was possible for me to respect the *understandings* of my fellow-creatures a little more," said Regina smiling; "there is a stupid perversity about most of them that is very annoying. I am rather glad, though, that these are two married women. So many people seem to think that folly is peculiar to single blessedness. But I will see the dear ladies, Mr. Brand," she added in a softened voice; "I am growing more reasonable. And my prospect of staying with the Oswestrys will put a stop to their entreaties."

Forewarned of the invasion of these attached ladies, Regina was not much surprised the next day to receive a visit from Mrs. Ramsay; but she certainly did not expect that Winny Hopper would accompany her friend.

"I was so very anxious to see you, Regina," cried Winny, as Mrs. Ramsay's large arms enfolded her slender, sable figure, "I really could not wait any longer."

"Well, to be sure, my dear, this is a miserable hole!" exclaimed Mrs. Ramsay, suffering Regina to glide back into her arm-chair; "I can offer you a somewhat larger apartment than this, or I'm sure I should not think of asking you to my house."

"That you can, indeed, dear Mrs. Ramsay!" echoed Winny.

"I am sure I can't think whatever induced you to come and bury yourself here," resumed Mrs. Ramsay.

"We know, — don't we, Regina?" simpered Winny.

"Why, a little gayety would have been the very thing for you, — just what I may say, without vanity, I could have offered you. I suppose you heard that I called at your little cottage at Holmwood the day after you left?"

"To be sure she did," squeaked Winny; "and very grateful, I am certain, she felt."

"It is a change for you, certainly," announced Mrs. Ramsay, looking larger every minute; "why, I am hardly so important a person as you will be, Regina, when you come of age, though, to be sure (her velvet cloak swelling like a pouter pigeon), I have the advantage of you, my dear, as a married woman! We must try and get you a husband, — a good husband, Regina."

"Take the trouble off your hands, you know," added Winny, blinking good-humoredly.

"You will be very much dazzled with your new possessions at first," resumed Mrs. Ramsay; "but we must try and break you in by degrees. And though Ramsay House is, it's true, not so large as Beyminstre, nor are our grounds so extensive, and our entrance hall is not above twenty-two feet by sixteen, I should say! still we make up fourteen beds, and I believe my house-keeping is on a very liberal scale, and it will be new to you, my dear, to be waited on by three footmen in livery and a butler in plain clothes, and to ride out in my coach whenever you like."

"You are very kind," said Regina, "but" —

"Now, my dear, as a friend," persisted Mrs. Ramsay, "let me assure you that it is very important that you should not remain *here*. You cannot, I am sure, with all your enormous advantages, mean to throw yourself away; I hope you will set yourself at a higher figure than that. Why, if my Julia had half your advantages, I declare I would not let her go under a nobleman, — I would not, indeed!"

"Yes! and it would be hard upon poor Mr. Brand to be thrown aside merely because you have come into a great fortune, and see it bestowed on Mr. Richard, — his inferior in every way!" Winny exclaimed, in so shrill a squeak that Regina thought she was going to cry about it.

She did not trust herself to reply to Miss Hopper, but turned to Mrs. Ramsay.

"I am very much obliged to you Mrs. Ramsay, but I am going to spend the rest of my minority with Lord and Lady Oswestry."

"The Earl and Countess of Oswestry?" echoed Mrs. Ramsay, correcting Regina as to the rank of the persons she mentioned; "why, oh! ah! — I'm sure, my dear, I'm very glad of it, — an earl, to be sure! Who would have thought that little Regina Howard would ever have come to this? It makes one think, — doesn't it Miss Hopper? Well, all I can say is, my dear, I wish my Julia was in your shoes; and I hope you will speak a word for old friends at any time, if you can. But I know my lady's very proud and uppish, and it's not very easy to get acquainted with her."

There was an intense purpose in Winny's compressed but smiling lips, that told of an inward resolve to secure for herself one day that difficult *entrée*, of which the strong Mrs. Ramsay almost despaired.

Regina merely said it would give her pleasure if she could at any time serve Mrs. Ramsay.

However, the interview which she had rather dreaded was at an end. Mrs. Ramsay took a very affectionate leave of Regina, promising that, when she next came to Prior street, she would be accompanied by Regina's old playmate, — her son James.

At this threat Regina ungratefully followed her downstairs, and confided to Mrs. Winter that, if Mrs. Ramsay ever called on her with a companion of the worthier gender, she was decidedly to be not at home.

"I have done with Mrs. Ramsay," thought Regina, "and now for Mrs. Chillingworth."

But two days elapsed before that lady made her desired appearance; and then, to Regina's amazement, she also appeared followed by the unwearied Winny Hopper.

"Come to see how you are getting on, Regina," began Winny; "could not keep away."

"I am come to take you home with me, my dear love," remarked Mrs. Chillingworth; "some of these good people, I dare say, will pack up your boxes, while we have a little chat together."

This mode of attack seemed to Regina more impertinent than Mrs. Ramsay's patronizing advances; she replied quietly, unabashed by the light glaring eyes that were riveted on her face, that she had already made arrangements which prevented her from accepting Mrs. Chillingworth's kind invitation. Winny seated, smirking, with her arms crossed stiffly before her, screwed her eyes, and nodded provokingly to Regina.

"That plan wont do at all, Regina," she cried; "Lord Oswestry is such a bad, bad man!"

Mrs. Chillingworth waved Winny into silence by a fierce gesture, and echoed, "A bad man, indeed! A most improper person to be staying with!"

"He is married, I believe," said Regina.

"Ah! poor Lady Oswestry!" squealed Winny.

"Poor Lady Oswestry!" repeated Mrs. Chillingworth. "No, Regina; *he* is not a person to whom I would intrust the daughter of a dear old friend! I could not answer to my own conscience to let you — a poor motherless girl — enter that house as an inmate."

"All this affection comes too late," thought Regina.

"Miss Hopper thinks with me that Effington is the most natural and suitable home for you till you come of age, and far more cheerful than Piermont, with my young people; my girls to play and sing with, and Chatham and Collingwood — your old playmates — longing to have you back again."

Regina had a very dim recollection one Christmas eve, in her grandfather's time, of Mr. Chatham Chillingworth, then

an impertinent Eton boy, refusing to dance with her because she was "a parson's daughter," and making his resolution, though addressed to his mother, quite audible to her offended ears; of his brother, Mr. Collingwood, she had no remembrance whatever.

"I am sorry that you and Miss Hopper do not esteem Lord Oswestry, and grateful to you for your kind thought of me," she replied; "but my plans are fixed with respect to my visit to Piermont. I have the cordial approbation of Mr. Brand in my present scheme."

"All I can say is, that I would not suffer a daughter of mine to stay at Piermont for a single week!" exclaimed Mrs. Chillingworth; "and I am ashamed of Mr. Brand for seconding such an idea. Miss Hopper will tell you fine stories of my lord. It is not as if he, — I really can't enter into particulars to a girl like you, — but there have been sad stories in which young *ladies* bore their part."

"Yes, indeed, Regina!" cried Winny, smiling as if it was the funniest thing in the world; "I was of course anxious to hear all about him when I was told he was your guardian; and I wrote to a friend at Carlsbad, who was there when Lord Oswestry and his family were passing through."

"And there was an English gentleman with two lovely daughters, and one of them, it was said, — in fact, he is a very bad man! and my friend remarked, 'That was quite Lord Oswestry; such tales were very common on his account.'"

"I am certainly very perverse," said Regina, with a smile; "but I prefer Mr. Brand's judgment to that of Miss Hopper! I always was, you know, very fond of Mr. Brand. And, as he seems to think that my morals will bear the contagion of Piermont for six or eight months, I am disposed to make the experiment."

"Very well, Miss Howard," exclaimed Mrs. Chillingworth, rising with dignity; "I have done what I believed to

be a sacred duty in warning you, and offering you a home at Effington, such as I think suited to your rank. We are not without a position in the country ; we have a tolerable circle of acquaintance ; but you prefer the glaring and dissolute circle of Piermont ; you are dazzled by a title, and I dare say will shortly marry a nobleman as worthless as the earl. However I have done ; good-morning ! ”

“ I thank you very much for your kind advice,” said Regina, steadily ; “ and I regret that I have no chance of renewing my acquaintance with you and your family during my stay at Piermont, since you have so strong an objection to its society.”

Regina could have hardly said anything more cutting ; for the zeal and perseverance with which Mrs. Chillingworth kept up something of an acquaintance with Lady Oswestry (who was bored by her) was very praiseworthy, and excellent in the mother of a family, and was perfectly transparent to all her acquaintance.

“ Good-by, Regina ! ” quoth Winny. “ I shall call and tell Mr. Brand what I have heard about Lord Oswestry, and then I dare say he will not allow you to go to Piermont.”

“ Meddling animal ! ” thought Regina, as Winny’s short frock and long legs vanished through the door. “ She knows how I despise her ; it must be as a paltry means of revenge that she tries to irritate me. I don’t believe anything against Lord Oswestry’s character, — Alban’s cousin, — Alban ! ” She paused, and sat musing over the fire. “ No, — I have done with Alban ! To send no reply to that letter, the last my dear grandmother ever wrote. Not one line, — not even the courtesy that every gentleman owes to a correspondent, to acknowledge the receipt of her letter. I could be patient with a great deal, but this is brutal. Well, I can forget too ! I am not a pining girl, to muse over an image that existed only in my own fancy ! I can look the realities of life in the face. My best friend bade me take his con-

duct in this crisis as the test of his worth and his love. He has failed, and I must learn to live alone."

She opened her desk, and turned over the papers within. She had none of his letters, — no little memorials hoarded of their brief intercourse; no flowers, no foolish scraps; their courtship had been too serious in her eyes for such petty trifling. All that remained to her from that brief episode were her sketch of Alban and the opal ring she wore. She looked for the sketch and burned it, took off the ring and put it away in its morocco case, ready to give it back when an opportunity should occur; perhaps on that proud day to which she was ever looking forward, when she should restore Beyminstre to the right possessor, and stand acquitted, even in his eyes, of any mercenary thoughts. And so, having settled, as it were, with the past, she turned her face toward the future. Nothing soothed her like music after fatigue or excitement. It was not the hour for a class, and she wandered into the music-room, where she was always welcome, and where she still took lessons of Mr. Winter, which she continued to make as remunerative as the worthy old gentleman would permit. She found her master disengaged, and soon forgot her cares for the time in one of Mendelssohn's intricate pianoforte movements. While she was thus employed, the old man accompanying her on the violin with a purity of tone and expression worthy of Molique, she was not likely to be sensible of an unusual stir in the house, and the portly Mrs. Winter was at her elbow, crying out her name repeatedly, before she could be recalled to passing events.

"My dear Winter, do stop that noise!" she called out; and the obedient musician paused, with his bow raised a few inches from the strings, ready to take up the strain again as soon as his good lady should have said her say. "There, my dear! what do you think of that?" she continued, presenting a card to Regina. "The Earl of Oswestry called

to see *you*, and sitting in your room at this minute! Keep a lord like him waiting!" she screamed, in reply to a very timid suggestion on the part of Mr. Winter, that his pupil might perhaps finish the little bit of slow movement she had just begun. "Well, I never! I think the world is turned upside down, with a vengeance!"

Regina would very gladly have avoided seeing any fresh person that day; but business overruled these trifling objections, and she trembled at the idea of keeping so great a person waiting for an instant.

He came forward the moment she entered the room, and took her hand to lead her to a seat.

"Miss Howard, I am very glad at last to make your acquaintance," he said.

As he stood close to her, looking straight down without bending in the least, with a sort of proud, reserved smile, his resemblance to Alban struck her suddenly. She felt the blush and the hot tears rising, but she struggled for composure, sank down into the chair he offered, and for a few seconds they surveyed each other.

He was very tall and thin, of a light complexion, with pale blue eyes and high features. Some slight traces of small-pox gave an unpleasant pallor to his face; and he had very fine teeth, which his haughty, constrained smile showed now and then, but rarely. At other times he looked cold and absent, but always high-bred.

The impression that Regina made on Lord Oswestry was that she was very beautiful, but that there was an original charm in her manner and bearing, which was more fascinating than beauty, and made her besides seem three or four years younger than she really was.

She had but one thought in reference to Lord Oswestry. How like he was to Alban! The familiar tone of his voice, when he began to speak again, made her heart bound.

He began by expressing his regret that Lady Oswestry

was not able to accompany him ; she was a bad sailor, the voyage had been rough, and she had not yet left her room ; but she joined her entreaties to his own, that Miss Howard would pay them an early visit at Piermont, and extend it until she came of age ; he concluded that she would then desire to take possession of her own house at Beyminstre.

Now, though Winny had that very morning warned Regina against this same person, — though she had denounced him as a dragon fatal to the softer sex as the celebrated monster in Schiller's ballad, — there was nothing in his look or manner to confirm these accusations. She felt quite at ease with him directly, he was so calm and plain-spoken.

"It is very kind in you and Lady Oswestry," she said, "and I accept very gratefully your offer of a home for the present. I only hope I shall not try your patience, for I shall be a minor eight months yet."

"I trust we may be able to keep you so long," he replied ; "but I don't expect it ; a great heiress (to say nothing of other attractions) is not likely to want opportunities for a change of residence ; so that, when you tire of Piermont" —

Regina lifted her clear regard to his face, — not fluttered nor bashful at the allusion he had hazarded. "I don't mean to tire of Piermont," she said with a smile ; "but, if I did, I should come back here."

"You have a nice, cheerful room," he said, looking round, "and quite in the gay world, I see ; for I suppose this is the main street of Bradford."

Regina could not help contrasting this remark with the loud contempt that Mrs. Ramsay had expressed for her little apartment.

"It's very quiet and pleasant," she said, "and I often watch the people from the windows when the lamps are lit, — the old street looks so pretty then ; and the country people come in to do their evening shopping."

"You must have been very lonely," he said, looking on her compassionately.

"I wished to be alone," she replied.

"True!" he said, bending his head like Alban; comprehending her, but not expressing any emotion. "Well, I shall be able to introduce you to Beyminstre very shortly. It is only ten miles from Piermont. Do you ride?"

"I used to ride a Shetland pony when I was a little girl, but afterward we had no horses."

"You must take it up again; and, if you should like the exercise," he added with a smile, "you are not likely to be without horses in future. But now, Miss Howard, on what day may we have the pleasure of expecting you at Piermont? I know that ladies don't 'get under way' quite so easily as gentlemen. Shall we say this day week?"

"If you please; I am very soon got under way," she answered, smiling. "I have no farewell visits to make; only a few poor people to see at Holmwood. We lived so very quiet; we knew scarcely any one."

"I think you were acquainted, though, with a connection of mine," he said, "a Mrs. Willingham?"

"Yes! we were very intimate with her; she was my dearest friend," said Regina, with a trembling voice.

"And her son, do you know anything of him?"

"He came twice to Dykeham on a visit to his mother."

"I met him in Egypt, and we travelled together for some weeks."

"Did you? I have heard nothing about him since Mrs. Willingham's death."

Lord Oswestry rose to go, and held out his hand, a slender, white hand, that again reminded her of Alban.

"Shall I send a servant over to escort you?" he asked.

"Oh, no! thank you; I am an experienced traveller, and I have a maid with me; besides, what is the distance? a mere nothing. Five-and-twenty miles!"

"Come, there is something you wish to say," remarked Lord Oswestry, observing a little hesitation in Regina's manner. "You must always remember that I am your guardian, and come to me in any difficulty."

"Thank you!" said Regina, blushing. "I was thinking only, that I am very rustic and uncivilized, and that if you will bespeak Lady Oswestry's indulgence for me, I shall be very grateful to you."

"When you *need* indulgence, Miss Howard," he said kindly, "I shall be happy to exert my influence with Lady Oswestry. Good by till Wednesday."

So Regina arranged her few worldly concerns before beginning her new career. She left the trusty Becky in care of her house at Holmwood, for she purposed returning to live there as soon as she was of age, and Becky was her almoner with two or three poor people, who had depended for years on Mrs. Arnold's quiet bounty. She paid a farewell visit to Mrs. Ramsay, but she thought it safer not to go near Mrs. Chillingworth, as she was on the point of leaving for Piermont; neither did she feel it necessary to embrace the tender Winny before she went.

And, on a cold, drizzling November morning, she stepped into her brougham, with a sinking heart and trembling nerves, like a timid, home-bred girl starting for a fashionable finishing academy.

CHAPTER IV.



IT was almost dark when Regina arrived at Piermont. She had gone up to dress on her arrival, and found a charming bedroom and dressing-room appropriated to her use. The bright fire in the low, polished grate gave a cheerful air of home-comfort to the room; and she lingered with her feet on the fender, until the clock on the mantelpiece warned her that she must prepare for dinner. She was not harassed by any anxieties about her toilet. Though her gown was made at Bradford, she knew there could be nothing very reprehensible in a plain, black crape dress, and she inherited that French perception which prevented her wearing anything that was not artistical; and her beautiful long hair wound round her head, was the most becoming, and in those days the most singular, of coiffures. She felt very solitary as she went down the great staircase alone, and it was a comfort to her that, when the door opened, Lord Oswestry came forward directly to lead her to his lady, and introduced the young stranger very kindly to her notice.

Lady Oswestry was about thirty, with large white arms and shoulders, smooth as marble, blazing dark eyes, black hair, a straight nose, and a scarlet spot of color upon her olive cheek. She quite startled Regina, turning her regal head as her husband spoke, and bowing in answer to the young lady's timid salutation.

Then she made room for her on the sofa close beside her, and asked if she was fond of dogs.

"Not very," Regina said.

Lady Oswestry had a little, long-haired spaniel behind her, nestling into her garnet velvet robe; another lay on the

cushion at the head of the couch, and a third was coiled up at the feet of his beautiful mistress.

"I've three children, I believe,—yes, three. I lost one last autumn, and as many dogs. I like my dogs best! Isn't this a beauty?"

Regina admired the little silky spaniel, half buried in the crimson damask cushion; and Lady Oswestry lifted it up in her handsome flexible hand, and then laid it back in its luxurious bed.

"I call them, after the three daughters of Louis XV., Loque, Chiffe, and Graille,—you recollect? This is Chiffe; Loque always gets behind me,—you are not afraid of him?"

"No,—I think I should grow very fond of such beautiful little things," said Regina, stroking Loque's silken, pendant ears.

"You are a great heiress, Miss Howard!" said Lady Oswestry, her scarlet lips parting with a gracious smile.

Regina looked up with a blush, and smiled in answer; she was growing quite at ease, and looked round the large, warm room, at once splendid and comfortable, with that sensation of enjoyment that is best experienced after a long and dreary journey. The room was only lit by two large branches on each side of the fireplace, each containing five lights, splendid with gilding and painted china; but the enormous fire, flashing and flickering in the brilliant steel fender, polished like glass, was sufficient to illuminate a larger apartment.

"Have you ever seen Beyminster?" asked Lady Oswestry.

"No,—never."

"It is such a lovely place,—quite in the Gothic style,—we must drive over to see it the first fine day. You are so much envied, Miss Howard; you can't think."

"Am I? I'm not at all glad," said Regina.

Lady Oswestry smiled, and then rising, with a soft indolence of manner, said slowly, "Now that we are acquainted with each other, I must make you known to the rest of the people. Mrs. Falconer, let me present Miss Howard to you: that's Captain Falconer near the marble table, — he is to take you in to dinner. Captain Falconer, come off my table, which you are going to upset, and let me introduce you to Miss Howard."

Mrs. Falconer, large, bold, and handsome, swept Regina from head to foot with a supercilious glance of her large blue eyes; while Captain Falconer, who had begun to sit on the mosaic table for want of something else to do, turned a thin, knavish face to Lady Oswestry, and came up as required.

A Baron and a Baroness Spitzbergen, a Lady Catherine and Mr. Griffin, were the next to whom she was made known; and then Lady Oswestry appealed to a gentleman by the name of Henry, who was quite at the other end of the room.

But "Henry" was talking with Lord Oswestry, and did not respond.

Lady Oswestry leaned on the back of a chair, and seemed meditating a second attack on this individual, when the door was thrown widely open and Mr. and Mrs. Chillingworth, Mr. Chatham Chillingworth, Miss Chillingworth, and Miss Hobhouse, were announced; and Regina had scarcely time for a smile of mingled surprise and contempt, before the respectable name of Miss Hobhouse was illustrated by the appearance of Winny Hopper, smirking, dancing, almost skipping with joy, as her patroness named her to Lady Oswestry and her lord.

Winny's costume deserves to be rescued from oblivion; it was such as never before figured in that saloon, and was almost too much for the polished gravity of Lord Oswestry, or the indolent good-breeding of his wife. She wore a

thick flowered scarlet satin skirt, — which had belonged to an old lady to whom her grandmother had been housekeeper, — and a black velvet jacket, with a long tail ; a wreath of poppies garnished her hair, which was always rough, at the top of which she had pitched a small lace cap, tilted up, as her bonnets were tilted, till it threatened to slide over on her nose. Her frock was short as usual, and she had a strong pair of cotton stockings and prunella shoes on her feet.

“How d’ye do, Regina?” cried Winny, running up the scale to an impossible height. “Left your friends the Wintners quite well?”

For Winny, like other low persons, thought she was inflicting a death-wound upon Regina, by casting in her teeth her intimacy with people of so inferior a station.

“Quite well, thank you,” said Regina, coldly ; and added to Lady Oswestry, who had taken a seat beside her on an ottoman, “Miss Hopper is inquiring after some old friends of my grandmamma, — people who were very kind to her and her father, when they came to England in the Revolution. He is an organist, and teaches music.”

“You must tell me all about that one day,” said Lady Oswestry. “I think anything concerning the emigrants is so interesting. Had Mrs. Arnold ever seen Marie Antoinette?”

“Oh, yes ! often, when she was a child.”

“Isn’t she odd ? Who is she ?” asked Lady Oswestry, directing her glance toward Winny.

“Don’t you know her, Lady Oswestry ?”

“Oh, yes, my dear ! I’ve just made her acquaintance,” she replied, lowering her low voice ; “that is to say, when I drove over to Mrs. Chillingworth’s yesterday, to ask them all here, she introduced this funny woman and asked leave to bring her. She said I should find her a useful sort of body, and that she could give some good hints to my governess,

who is rather too young ; but I took her because she sings so well."

"Regina forgets her old friends now," squeaked Winny, sliding up to the ottoman where she was.

"I never forget my *friends*, Miss Hopper, I've so few," said Regina, quietly.

"You don't ask after Mr. Brand, Regina," cried Winny. "Sad flirt! sad flirt! dear Lady Oswestry."

This was rather free and easy for a first visit. Lady Oswestry glanced at her without making a reply.

"Are you a flirt, Miss Howard? I am so glad! it will amuse me infinitely. You will be at no loss for victims, I promise you."

"It is quite a discovery of Miss Hopper's," said Regina, smiling; "but she is rather famous for her discoveries. I dare say you have found out that she is a learned lady."

"She is an odious, creeping thing, but so useful, Mrs. Chillingworth says," remarked Lady Oswestry, idly unfurling her fan. "She took the charity-school at Effington for a week, when the mistress was ill, and she is to cover all the school-books at Piermont with canvas, and print the names on them. Lord Oswestry is anxious about our schools, which are in a wretched plight at present, and I am sure *I have* no notion how to cover their books for them. It is all quite out of my way. Henry!" again she was unsuccessful.

"It is the Newmarket meeting they are so busy discussing," she remarked. "I want to introduce my cousin, Lord Henry Montresor, to you. My father had no son, and his father is now Marquis of Shields. Henry's eldest brother is married, — such a sad thing for him, poor fellow!"

She bit her scarlet lip, and looked annoyed.

"It's odd how fond the men are of those detestable horses. They like them better than their wives I warn you!" she added, with a forced laugh.

Regina could not help thinking of her ladyship's recent

confession, "that she liked her dogs better than her children!" but she was prudent enough to be silent; and just then Lord Oswestry crossed over with Lord Henry, and presented him to her.

His appearance did not interest her in the least, though she had never seen any one so handsome or so showy. He had a brilliant complexion, fine features, and very rich-colored brown hair; his figure, too, was striking, and he dressed with great care. But there was such a self-sufficiency in his air that to her taste he was thoroughly displeasing. He did not trouble her, however, with much of his notice; but, having contracted his eyelids, to view her perfectly from head to foot, he bowed and went back to the gentlemen.

He was very poor and very extravagant. He gambled on the turf, to the great surprise and horror of his father, who was on the turf himself, and spent thousands and tens of thousands on his stud; and then wrung his hands to think that his son, who had from childhood heard racing extolled as the loftiest aim of existence, should have contracted such a habit.

All his habits which were permanent were bad; all his emotions which were transient were good; so that he was a very promising young man to introduce to an heiress; and, therefore, Lady Oswestry had sent for him to spend some time at Piermont, before any one else had time to make an impression on Regina.

Dinner was announced, and they were just rising to go to the dining-room, when Lord Oswestry, who was making his way toward Lady Catherine Griffin, a fierce female with moustaches, turned short round, and held out his hand to greet a gentleman who now entered.

"Why, Alban, I had despaired of you!" he said.

And then a voice that Regina had not heard for years, and that thrilled through every pulse, replied, "have I kept

you waiting? I must try and make my peace with Lady Oswestry."

"Alban! he was in England!—here! He had come to explain, to understand,—at least to see her again; she could now justify herself,—she could upbraid, forgive."

And as Lord Oswestry led him by the arm toward the sofa, while he exchanged greetings with her ladyship, she half rose up, trembling, blushing,—a smile of exquisite happiness parting her lips, her hand half extended, for one wild moment feeling as if their hearts had never been estranged; and then, as his frigid and distant bow responded to hers, she saw that this interview was not of his seeking,—that he was still implacable, and that it was her task to forget. Those hot choking tears, which almost blinded her for a moment, were forced back again, and she was as cold as himself.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Sir Alban once or twice at Dykeham," she said, not withdrawing her extended hand; and he could not refuse to touch her trembling fingers, in which he might have felt the pulses still beating.

"This is a day of cousins," whispered Lady Oswestry, bending over Regina till her perfumed black lace lappets touched her face; "I hope you like mine best."

But by this time Captain Falconer was at her side to lead her away, and the smile with which she replied might be interpreted as her ladyship best liked. She happened to be on the same side of the table with Sir Alban, and therefore saw as little of him as if he had been dining at Cairo; and she seldom heard his voice, which the total silence of her own cavalier permitted her to do as often as it was audible. He was then talking German with the Baroness Spitzbergen,—a Russian lady married to a Dane,—whose French was quite unintelligible, and who did not speak a word of English; and Regina, though she read German a little, could not catch a word they said.

As for the Honorable Captain Falconer, he could hardly be expected to amuse Regina. They had not a thought, and, much more, an acquaintance, in common; and as to her fortune, though money was his god, yet he was a married man, and could not expect to get any of it.

The dinner passed too soon. Regina was in a tumult, she hardly knew whether of pleasure or of pain. To be under the same roof with Alban! She could not define her emotions, and she had no time. She followed in the train of ladies to the drawing-room, and was very sensible of Lady Oswestry's kindness, taking her arm, and standing with her on the hearth-rug, and asking her little questions that put her on an easy footing with the other women.

Even Mrs. Falconer's insolent eyes unbent a little, and she vouchsafed to say that she hoped to see a good deal of Miss Howard, and to make her a bold horsewoman. Lord Oswestry had been consulting Adolphus that morning about a horse for Miss Howard, and they had decided on such a pretty creature, as quiet as a lamb!

"How very kind of Lord Oswestry!" exclaimed Regina.

Lady Oswestry laughed, and touched Regina's bright hair with her forefinger; while the Baroness Spitzbergen, a fat wax doll, told Regina, in French that sounded to her like Kamschatskan, that she would look very well "*en Amazone*," and not break the back of her horse, which the baroness said had been her own misfortune more than once.

Poor Mrs. Chillingworth and her daughter felt at once that Regina was out of their sphere; that she was a person of importance at Piermont, where they were only admitted on sufferance, as bores of country neighbors, whom it was quite necessary to invite sometimes, and have done with it. They were not even in the magic circle on the hearth-rug. Mrs. Chillingworth was trying to talk with Lady Catherine, — a hopeless effort; and Miss Chillingworth was hiding her yawns over a costly book of engravings. And as they were

thus grouped, Lady Oswestry, having drawn Regina's arm through hers, a little hand stole between them on the soft folds of her ladyship's dress, and a little voice said, "Mamma!"

"It's my plague of a boy!" said Lady Oswestry, turning round. "Why are you not in bed all of you? Make your bow to Miss Howard, Exmoor, and call your sisters."

Lord Exmoor, a thin, sensitive child with a pale face, obeyed his mother, and then stood looking earnestly at Regina.

Lady Violet, beautiful and haughty, answered her brother's summons, and greeted Regina like a grown woman. Lady Clara, fair and *espiegle*, who was enjoying a game at romps with the good-natured baroness, in which any language was superfluous, would not come.

Violet, the eldest child, was ten; the boy not yet nine; the youngest girl only just six years old.

"I am so fond of children! I hope you will let me see a great deal of yours, Lady Oswestry!" exclaimed Regina.

"As much as you like," laughed her ladyship.

"Come and talk to me," said Regina, taking a low chair, and drawing Lord Exmoor to her.

"Where do you come from?" he asked, looking earnestly at her.

"From Bradford."

"What is Bradford?"

"A little town, — not the great Bradford in Yorkshire, — but a little town here in Kent."

"What are the people like?"

"Just like every one else, to look at," replied Regina, laughing.

"You are not like every one else," said the child, seriously.

"No two people are quite alike, if you look at them closely," observed Regina.

"I have remarked that," replied the boy.

Regina was interested by the strange intelligence of his look, — the more so, that she really did not venture to speak to the proud Lady Violet.

He stood in silence for a minute, and then said softly, gliding his hand down it as he spoke, "White arm, white arm!"

She laughed, and pressed him to her side.

"Do you go to school?" she asked.

"Not yet; not till I go to Eton next year."

"Don't let him trouble you, Miss Howard," said Lady Oswestry, as she was crossing the room.

"Do you love dogs?" asked the child.

"No!"

"Good!"

"Why do you ask? and why is it good?"

"Because then, perhaps, I shall not trouble you."

"I am sure you will not; we are going to be great friends."

"For life?" he asked, seriously.

"For as long as you please, — till you go to Eton, and grow ashamed to have a woman for a friend."

"Speak in earnest, — your eyes are earnest," said the strange child, gazing at her.

"I am quite earnest; we will be friends as long as you like."

"Miss Howard, do you sing?"

Regina started and blushed. Lord Oswestry was leaning over the back of her chair. At first she had thought it was Alban.

"Yes; but not well enough to exhibit," she replied.

"Will you let me judge of that!"

"Oh, directly."

The sound of a piano now came through the half-closed

folding-doors at the end of the drawing-room. Lord Oswestry led her in that direction.

"Tell me if you like that voice," he said.

There were but two persons in the music-room, — a very lovely girl at the piano, and Lord Henry turning over the loose sheets of music lying on the desk.

A voice the most exquisite, the most deliciously sweet that can be imagined, poured out gently, without effort or affectation, a simple English ballad.

But, though enchanted with the songstress, Regina's thoughts were busied in trying to recall that delicate face to her memory. Those blue eyes, so intense in their color that they seemed to suffuse the lids with their own tint; that very light brown hair, steeped in gold; that skin so soft, yet of an opaque quality, on which the blush was of a scarlet tinge, as it now rose fast over face and neck as Lord Henry bent lower and whispered his praises of her song, — yes, it flashed upon her all at once, it was Edith Carleton, with whom she had sung at the concert at Bradford.

The young lady had now risen from the piano, and, seeing Regina, stood timidly waiting to be recognized. "Do you know me? Do you recollect Regina?" she exclaimed, hurrying toward Miss Carleton and clasping both her hands. "What a pleasure to meet you after this long time!"

"It is indeed, dear Miss Howard," said Edith, looking confused yet happy.

"I did not know, Lord Oswestry, that Miss Carleton was staying with you," exclaimed Regina.

"Let me show you the cameo that Lady Oswestry was speaking of at dinner," he said, leading her to a cabinet at the other end of the room.

"Beautiful; Canova's night!" cried Regina.

"Miss Carleton is governess to our children," he remarked in a low tone.

"Is she? then she is staying here always. That is very

pleasant for me ; I met her a long time ago, and took a great fancy to her."

"Ah, but the governess ; you see you can't be intimate ; you must avoid that, — Lady Oswestry will tell you so."

"Why?" asked Regina.

"In the first place, her time is very much occupied with teaching."

"Oh, you may be assured, Lord Oswestry, I will not infringe on her hours of study," said Regina.

"No; but, independent of that, it would not do for you. Lady Oswestry will explain it all to you; your circle of acquaintance is not yet fixed now; if you were to cultivate Lady Catherine."

"What! that dry, spidery woman?"

Lord Oswestry laughed.

"You see, Lord Oswestry, what a Vandal I am. I am quite ashamed of myself, for the lady might be related to you for anything I could tell."

"There's no connection between us, on my word," he said, still laughing; "and pray, don't think I wish to exclude you from the governess; only that any marked attention to her, — however, my lady will explain all that to you, and I wish you to do as you like in everything."

"Thank you!" cried Regina, and with the speed of an arrow she was at the piano again, where Edith was singing another song.

"But you are not to escape me," said Lord Oswestry as he joined her; "you are going to sing now."

Regina sang a little Spanish air that delighted Lord Oswestry; Lord Henry had lounged away from the piano during her performance; but Mr. Chatham Chillingworth replaced him, and complimented Regina till she was quite weary.

And, before she entirely lost patience, Lady Oswestry glided up to her, and whispered that, if she was tired with

the bustle of moving, which she knew by experience was a horrid business, she had better steal off and go to bed ; and, as she gratefully followed this advice, she caught a glimpse through the folding-doors of Alban playing at chess with Winny Hopper.

CHAPTER V.

UNCTUALLY at eight o'clock Regina's maid appeared at her bedside with a cup of fragrant coffee, and an intimation that breakfast was ready always at ten. She had not been able to go to sleep till very late, after all her excitement, and she was in a profound slumber when the entrance of Mrs. Flimsey dispelled her morning dream. She sat up, and sipped her coffee while Mrs. Flimsey laid out the things for her toilet.

It would be out of nature for a lady's maid not to gossip, and Mrs. Flimsey had so much to tell, she hardly knew where to begin. There was a great deal to say about the magnificence of Piermont ; about the sideboard of plate, which, through the condescension of the maitre d'hôtel, Mrs. Flimsey had been permitted to gaze upon, till her eyes fairly ached with the blaze of gold and silver salvers and goblets and cups.

"And then, mem, the liberal way in which everything is conducted all over the house : — even the governess has a fire in her bedroom, and a footman to answer the study bell."

"The governess is an old friend of mine, Flimsey."

"Is she, indeed, mem ? Well, and the house-keeper is

a clergyman's daughter, and sits in a room by herself, not even mixing with the maître d'hôtel, nor the lord's valet, who is quite the gentleman, and can't abide foreigners; he says he has seen too much of them."

"I am half a foreigner, Flimsey."

"Indeed, mem? I am sure Mr. Edmonds had no *idea* of that. Great excitement has prevailed respecting your arrival, mem, — and he says it is well known that you can write yourself 'her ladyship' any day that you please."

Under what form of correspondence Regina was likely to write herself "her ladyship," she did not pause to inquire; she took her gloves and handkerchief and hastened into the breakfast-room, which in that house was also the library, and where the guests were already beginning to assemble.

The gentlemen were dressed for hunting, and three or four who had ridden over to breakfast with Lord Oswestry, before starting for the meet, were lounging round the large fireplace, talking and laughing rather noisily.

Mrs. Chillingworth and her daughter were there, looking rather forlorn. Winny, perched sideways on her chair, was smiling joyfully at the men, and looking as if she was quite ready to begin a polka with any one of them.

Lady Catherine, stiff and upright as if she had never gone to bed, was reading the *Times* at the full stretch of her arms, occasionally declaiming bits of the leading article to her host, with her own remarks appended.

Baron Spitzbergen, ugly and by no means clean to look at, and who, report said, remained smoking in bed till three minutes before he thought fit to descend to breakfast, was glancing through a handful of thin sheets of paper, which were evidently foreign letters.

Lord Oswestry, glad to get from under Lady Catherine's fire, came to meet Regina, and placed her in a delightful reading chair, at the chimney-corner. "Do you find Pier-

mont cold?" he asked. "Lady Oswestry always complains of the exposed situation."

"I think the house is delightfully warmed," she said; "and it did not seem to me to stand high as I approached it yesterday. Oh, I see, — from that window the ground falls suddenly. What a lovely view! Are those cedars? and beyond, lower down, is there a river?"

He went with her to the window, and pointed out the different objects to her notice; and while thus engaged Lord Henry came in with Sir Alban, and a general good-morning was exchanged; and then Lady Oswestry made her appearance, and hoped nobody had waited, and wished that *Le Fevre* had made the tea, and called Regina to sit by her, and signed Lord Henry into the next chair, — all with her usual indolent grace, diffusing a perfume of magnolia wherever she moved, and dazzling Regina with her beauty and her splendid toilet.

Regina was equally an object of attention to the gentlemen. It was satisfactory to find that the heiress was lovely, with an exquisite figure, and a timid manner, which gave them the impression that she was rather soft, and therefore easy to win. The women were disposed to her, because she avoided the notice of the men, and was little likely, — her wealth set aside, — to obtain it with that pure spiritual gaze and unflattering indifference to their admiration.

"Would you like to drive to the meet this morning, Miss Howard?" asked Lady Oswestry, leaning a little aside to allow the servant behind her to pour out the tea almost over her shoulder.

"I should like it some day when you are going, Lady Oswestry."

"Oh, my dear, don't wait for that! The whole of the present company excepted, I think hunting-men the most uninteresting set of beings, and my object would be to put

as many miles between us as possible, instead of spurring after the dear creatures before the sun is well risen."

"It is not the hunters I want to see," said Regina, lowering her voice so as not to offend the red coat on the other side of her; "but I should like for once to see a pack of hounds. Such a thing has never come in my way."

"It is the best part of the show, certainly," replied her ladyship, glancing contemptuously down the table. "Henry, did you hear that Miss Howard had never seen a pack of hounds?"

"Really!" he answered, hardly pausing in his indefatigable exertions, devouring a breakfast fit for a ploughman.

"Will you drive with Lady Catherine to Crackskull Common, or wherever it is?" asked Lady Oswestry; "and my dear," she added ironically, handing Regina a printed card that lay on the table, "whenever you chance to have a headache, — there is a list of the hunting days that may be depended on, — I advise you on those occasions to breakfast in your own room if your nerves are not made of cast-iron."

Regina could not help laughing at this suggestion; for twenty or more people, when the greater number are men, do not breakfast together without some little noise. Jokes, laughter, discussions, carving, moving chairs and plates, all tend rather to disturb that perfect quietude which Lady Oswestry preferred.

"Well, Miss Howard, what are you going to do?" asked Lord Oswestry, approaching her after breakfast.

"I am going to ask Lady Oswestry when I can see the children; perhaps I may walk with them."

"My children will be much flattered," he said; "but the rest of the company will complain of your desertion."

Two of the gentlemen now reminded Lord Oswestry that he promised to present them to his ward.

They were a Sir John Lawler and a Mr. Poole; both single men.

Sir John asked Regina if she rode; to which she replied, "Not yet;" and Mr. Poole hazarded a conjecture that the fog was clearing off, — which she thought was possible; and then Lady Oswestry looked round among the group of ladies gathered about her, and invited them, if they were of a literary turn, to help themselves to books before they left the room; and she advised them to make haste if they did not happen to like tobacco, for she caught a glimpse of more than one cigar-case; "and these charming heroes of the present century," she added, taking Regina's arm, "are quite equal to lighting them before we are out of reach of the poisonous smell."

A britschka was at the door for such of the ladies as chose to drive to the meet; and Lady Oswestry drew Regina into one of the great hall windows, to see the people off, as she said.

Lady Catherine passed them in a strong bonnet and rough hairy coat, and Mrs. Falconer, in a beautiful toilet, looking all the handsomer from the contrast to her strong-minded companion. Then the baroness came down buried in furs, and Mrs. Chillingworth, looking very cold, because she thought it unbecoming to be wrapped up too much.

"I wish them joy, — don't you?" said Lady Oswestry, pressing Regina's arm. "How pretty they will all look in an hour's time, when the fog has fairly seized their noses, and their cheeks are streaked with blue like a soap-ball! There's Sir Alban, — I want to speak to him."

Her ladyship rapped against the window-pane with her pointed fingers; Sir Alban, who was just passing, rode up close and raised his hat.

"Where's Mootie?" she asked, putting her coral lips close to the glass; "you promised to bring her when you came."

"She arrives to-day, Lady Oswestry; she will be much flattered by your kind remembrance."

"We were such good friends at Cairo."

"You were very kind to her indeed."

"Do you remember the slice of water-melon I used to give her every day at luncheon, and my lord fancying it would disagree with her?"

"I can assure you *she* remembered it long after you left, and used to shake her head very reproachfully at me whenever I offered her a bit of bread, which she had liked so much before."

"And Tuny?"

"Oh, I brought Tuny as well. I meant to have sold him, but when it came to the point I could not make up my mind to it, and you see we were in Egypt, half way home."

"And then you must not forget, that when you go back, we will take care of them for you, if it should not be altogether convenient to you to travel with them."

Regina felt her heart stop, and then struggle to go on, — a new sensation to her. Why should he go back? She could not bear the idea of his going again to India, when, as she hoped, all would so soon be settled; if he would only wait till next June, she hoped it would be over, and he would be master of Beyminstre. She would speak to Lord Oswestry as soon as ever she could, — as soon as she knew him a little better; or she would write to Mr. Brand; she must be doing something. And who was Tuny? and, above all, who was Mootee?

Standing a little behind her hostess, she could observe Sir Alban more at leisure than she had hitherto done. He appeared to have recovered his health, but was looking older and darker than she remembered him, — perhaps a little harder. Time had sharpened his features, as it does in the case of all persons who think; and she could not but allow, with perhaps a little pride at her early selection,

that not one of the gentlemen present could approach him in grace of manner, or in a certain calm and intelligent dignity of bearing.

"Yes," he replied to her ladyship's last remark, "Lord Oswestry, with his usual kindness, told me that Piermont should be Mootee's home if I left her behind; and I should consent the more readily, as I hope that she might be of some use to your ladyship."

"That lovely Mootee!" she answered, rubbing the pane with her handkerchief, made misty by her breath; "she would be useful to me for a pet; I should soon love her better than Chiffe, or even Loque; I'm tired of Graille, and, if I knew any one who wanted a dog, I do think I would give him away. Oh! they are moving at last! Does not Henry look handsome?"

This remark was addressed to Regina, just as Sir Alban raised his hat to the ladies in the window, before riding off. He bowed slightly; Lady Oswestry kissed her hand.

"He is a fine rider," she said, glancing after Sir Alban, "and so is Lord Oswestry; it runs in families. But Henry admires you so much, you can't think. Now let us go into the drawing-room."

There was Winny, with a card and pencil, which she held up high before Lady Oswestry.

"I think, Lady Oswestry, if you will look over this little list!" she squealed.

Lady Oswestry could hardly control her countenance at the sound of Winny's voice. "Oh, Miss Hopper! I trust entirely to your experience," she said. "I dare say you will be so very kind as to go down to the school and settle it with Mrs. Pearsons; I am utterly ignorant of these things, and too old, I'm afraid, to reform."

"But if you will have the kindness," persisted Winny, pursuing Lady Oswestry with her card and pencil, which she plunged at her like a spear, "if you will have the great

kindness to cast your eyes over this, you will see that we want desks and other items."

Lady Oswestry took the card, to serve (as she afterward told Regina) as a buckler against the thrusts of the pencil; while Winny followed up her advantage, by sitting down close beside her on the sofa, and talking her almost to death.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Chillingworth swept up to Regina.

"I am very glad, my dear, to meet you here," she whispered, "and trust it will be of permanent advantage to you. With regard to that little affair that I mentioned to you, I am happy to inform you that I am *convinced*, and so is Miss Hopper, that it was *all a scandalous* report, without truth or foundation. And therefore, my dear, here we are, and hope to be here often; and when we have the pleasure of seeing the Oswestrys at Effington, I trust that we shall be able to make a visit there, agreeable to *you* also."

Times were changed to be sure. Regina bowed her thanks.

"When may I see the children?" she asked Lady Oswestry soon after.

"My dear, at all times and seasons. Oh, never mind their lessons; they are a mere farce at their age. Violet will soon have masters, and Exmoor will go to school, and I don't care the least whether they ever learn to read and write. I had no end of education, and I don't know what it has ever done for me."

"Which way?" began Regina.

"Oh, I will introduce you; make you free of the school-room."

"Me, too, dear Lady Oswestry!" cried Winny, jumping up.

"Oh, Miss Hopper, if you would kindly write down those excellent remarks, that I might show them to my lord, — for my memory is very bad, — *all* of them, if you will be so *very* kind! There!" she exclaimed with the glee of a girl as

they fled together into the hall; "I thought I should *never* get away from that awful list. What a woman! But I suppose we shall be rid of her to-morrow; she *must* go with the Chillingworths, don't you think?"

"Of course, Lady Oswestry; unless you ask her to stay."

"I, my love? I give you my word I would sooner have all the Chillingworths; but they are your friends, — are they not?"

"Indeed, Lady Oswestry, they treated me with the most studied neglect until very lately."

"I understand. Oh, people are all alike, my dear, with some rare exceptions. This door you will recollect; the last in the gallery. There, Miss Carleton, I have brought you an old acquaintance. Violet, my dear, what an attitude!"

Lady Oswestry was gone, and Edith came forward timidly.

"This is very kind of you, Miss Howard."

"Regina, if you please, Edith."

"May I?"

"If you wish for my company in this room."

"Dear Regina, how much I shall enjoy it!"

"You are come to see me, too?" asked Lord Exmoor.

Lady Clara jumped on Regina's knees.

"I am come to see you all. Have you done your lessons?"

"Not quite," said Lady Clara; "finish my sum for me."

"Let me see it — what a little one — four and five make nine, I should say."

"No, seven — seven!" said the spoiled child, hanging round Regina's neck.

"I have put nine, and now it is right. And what is Exmoor about?"

"My dear Edith, he is reading Gil Blas."

"You naughty boy; where did you find it?"

"On the top shelf," he said quietly.

"It is not a nice book," said Regina.

"Is it not?" he asked; "have you read it?"

"I have; that is why I know it is not fit for you."

"Then I will not read it; but you must tell me a story instead."

"We are going out walking now, in the park," suggested Miss Carleton.

"And I am coming with you," said Regina.

"Let me walk with you," cried Lord Exmoor.

"And you can tell us the story as we go," said Lady Clara.

Lady Violet politely apologized for her brother and sister; she feared they were very troublesome.

They all went into the park, the two younger children with their hoops, Lady Violet walking stately by the side of Miss Carleton.

The first thing they did was to quarrel. Lord Exmoor wanted to take Regina across the new bridge to the pheasantry; Lady Clara stoutly maintained that it was a great deal prettier in the upper park, — the way to the steward's cottage. From words they came to blows in a minute. The little waxen Clara, with her sky-blue eyes glancing through her golden curls, beat her brother on the head with her thick hoop-stick, and he threw his hoop over her, and dragged her along the walk so fast, that at last she fell down on the gravel and scratched her knees. Then shrieks and vociferations on both sides filled the air. Poor Miss Carleton turned helplessly from one to the other; she was too gentle, and too unused to children, to have the least control over them.

"Pray, be quiet! pray, don't quarrel!" she implored.

Regina snatched up Clara, and tried to soothe her, and, after a little coaxing, the young lady left off crying, and even condescended, at Miss Howard's request, to be reconciled to her brother. Then, without again referring to the disputed point, she walked on with Miss Carleton, as chance

directed, along the side of a plantation that skirted the park palings.

"This is a nice walk ; so dry and sheltered," she remarked to Lady Violet, as the others ran on before them.

"Yes ; this is my cousin Henry's favorite walk," said Violet. "I dare say we shall meet him on his return from hunting. He often leaves his horse at the upper lodge, and walks to the house through this plantation."

Edith's face was crimson.

Regina considerably looked away ; but she said to herself, — "I hope my poor little friend is not falling in love with that odious red-faced man, just because he pays her a few compliments, and sometimes meets her out walking." But she could not help feeling a little uneasy.

While she was dressing for dinner, Lady Oswestry came into her room.

"My dear !" she exclaimed, "she stays ! That crawling creature stays !" .

"Miss Hopper ! my dear Lady Oswestry, how is that ?"

"I wish I knew, my love ; she got hold of my lord with her card, and ran him through, I suppose, with her pencil-case ; but the end of it was, he came up to me and informed me that she had kindly consented to prolong her visit, in order that she might teach the schoolmistress to teach the girls to *mark* ! Do you know what that means ?"

"Oh, yes ! Lady Oswestry, — I have taught girls myself to do it."

"Ah ! then there *is* such a thing ! I rather thought it was a hoax ; however I said, 'Very well, your majesty.'"

"Do you know, Lady Oswestry, I am lost in wonder ; that woman gets all she wants. It is not many years ago that she was longing in vain to know Mrs. Chillingworth."

"Those brazen people always do, my dear ; and everybody knows, when a person gets *into* a house, it's a hard matter to get them *out* again. But how she dresses ! and

(for a pious woman) how she ogles! Well, now we will come down and hear all the thrilling particulars of the 'run.'"

Winny was in the thick of it. Perched on a chair in her tail-coat and gaudy skirt, in the very midst of the hunting men, five or six of whom had been asked to dinner, she was listening and questioning with great animation. They were talking of a famous leap that Sir Alban had taken, extolling it as if he had taken another Bhurtpore. Sir John Lawler came up to Lady Oswestry, who was seated with Regina, and tried to describe to her the situation and the risk of the achievement.

"I don't understand, Sir John, — I never do," she said; "he went over a wall, and a brook, and a tree."

"Not a tree, Lady Oswestry!"

"Well, he went over a number of things that he had much better have ridden away from; just like Lord Oswestry. And then, when he comes home on a stretcher, — I am talking of you, Sir Alban, — when you come home on a stretcher, and are laid up for six weeks with a broken collar-bone, I for one will not nurse you; will *you*, Miss Howard?"

Regina blushed and trembled.

"You will never hear the last of that leap, Alban," said Lord Oswestry as he joined them.

"So it seems," he replied.

"It bores you, doesn't it?" said Lady Oswestry.

"They address their compliments to the wrong person," he remarked; "it was Firebrand took the leap, not I."

"The finest hunter in the country," said her lord.

"You will ride Mootie, Lady Oswestry?" said Sir Alban; "she is as gentle as a lamb."

"Oh! his horses," thought Regina.

"Perhaps — I have almost given up riding. I want to show you one of Henry's sketches in my album; you remember my Egyptian dress?"

Lady Oswestry moved to a table at some distance. Lord Oswestry took her place beside Regina.

"I have been wishing to speak to you, Miss Howard," he said, "ever since yesterday. I am anxious to learn that Sir Alban's coming here is not disagreeable to you."

"To me? surely not," she answered hurriedly, and she felt the color rushing into her face; she hoped Lord Oswestry knew nothing of her former acquaintance with Alban. She almost feared to hear him speak again.

"I am apt to decide in characters, hastily perhaps," he said calmly; "and I have an idea that Miss Howard possesses great delicacy of feeling, and might, therefore, be annoyed at meeting a person who had been supposed heir to a property to which she has, I am sure, worthily succeeded."

"If you did but know how miserable it has made me! I mean the bequest," faltered Regina.

"You see I have not misjudged you," he went on in the same quiet tone; "but I assure you I would not have asked my cousin to make Piermont his home while in England, as I have done, were it not that he entirely shares my opinions on this subject."

Regina was breathless; her color flitting fast.

"He *had* expected to be Sir Herbert's heir, — he believed it to be inevitable; but I confess it gave *me* no surprise to learn the disposition of his property. The wretched terms on which he stood with his brother — I believe you know the family history?"

Regina bowed.

"I felt convinced that if there could be found a loophole he would avail himself of it; and, before Sir Herbert's death, he dropped some hints that the great aim of his life had been long accomplished. We were intimate — and I knew his one desire to be, that Beyminstre should never descend to his brother's heirs."

Regina tried to speak, but failed.

"I explained all this to Sir Alban when we met in Egypt. I pointed out to him that it was his own father who had robbed him of Beyminstre, by destroying the entail. After that, it became an indifferent question to whom it should fall. Had it not been left to you, it would have gone to enrich the county hospital."

"I wish it had," said Regina.

"At any rate, I hope you are convinced that Alban meets you without any sense of injury. He is a person for whom I feel the highest esteem. He has already distinguished himself; and will most likely rise high in his profession, which he would never have done had he succeeded to Beyminstre. I am half disposed to envy him, and, altogether, I am very glad that you should meet."

"How kind you are — how very kind — to take all this trouble to explain to me!" Regina began.

It crossed her mind that she should like to say at once that she wished to get rid of Beyminstre; but she was afraid, — her manner was then too agitated, — her voice shook so that she could hardly get through two sentences. She would tell him the very next time he touched upon the subject.

Sir John Lawler took Regina in to dinner. Lord Oswestry called to him to bring Miss Howard to his left hand.

"This is always your place," he said, "and nobody is to be affronted. It is my business to look after you, to see that you want for nothing. It ought to be no sinecure to take care of the heiress of Beyminstre."

Sir John Lawler thought so, too. He made up his mind to work hard for the situation. He talked, it was hard to say of what, without intermission. Lord Oswestry addressed her sometimes, and smiled at her look of weariness. She, in her turn, could not help smiling to see him striving to comprehend the French of the baroness, who sat on his right.

But through everything she continued watching Sir Alban, who was sitting next to Winny, and who was engaged

in what seemed a very interesting conversation. If it had not been for Sir John, she thought she could have heard what they were talking about; but, as it was, she caught nothing but Winny's eyes rolling like billiard-balls, and the name pretty frequently repeated, of "poor Mr. Brand!"

CHAPTER VI.



PEOPLE came and went at Piermont, and still the sprightly Winny stayed. So did the Falconers, who were always welcome guests with the Oswestrys; young, gay, and insolent, they were always ready to promote any scheme of pleasure, always ready to laugh at quiet worthy people, and sufficiently accomplished to be really useful in those showy amusements to which the English even of the higher classes are very sparingly addicted. They were clever in charades, and tableaux; they rode and danced well; they both played billiards admirably; and a handsome woman at a billiard-table is a great attraction in a country-house; and then they were not too particular. Captain Falconer was willing at any time to gamble till he was up to his knees in cards, and his wife would flirt to the extremest verge of what could be allowed in society, with any man who was of sufficient consequence to deserve her notice. Regina did not like them at all, though Mrs. Falconer was very civil to her, trying to make her as bad as she was herself; she did not like the fierce Lady Catherine and her sneering husband; she did not like Lord Henry with his vacant, impertinent manners; nor the other men who came and went, whom she hardly knew by name, who tried to flatter her

and make her talk. She used to get into a corner of an evening with Edith Carleton and the children, and try as much as possible to shrink out of everybody's notice.

One evening she was playing at spellicans with Lord Exmoor, against Edith Carleton and Lady Clara. They had got to a round table quite at the other end of the room, and were laughing and joking over the game as happy as possible, all children together.

One by one, the gentlemen, as they came in from the dining-room, loitered up to the round table to find out what it was that made the heiress so merry; all except Lord Henry, who had dropped on Lady Oswestry's sofa all among the cushions, and Sir Alban who was pinioned by Mrs. Falconer as soon as he entered the room.

Lord Oswestry came up at last.

"Are you not cold out here, Miss Howard?"

"Not at all, thank you; am I, Exmoor?" she said, putting her hand to the little boy's face.

"Quite warm; pray, papa, don't take Miss Howard away," said the child, holding her hand fast.

"What is your game? Is it very difficult?" he asked.

Regina gave him her ivory hook.

"Fancy papa playing at spellicans!" cried Lady Clara nestling against Miss Carleton.

"What are your stakes?" asked Captain Falconer.

"Oh! now there's no pleasure in going on; we will play another time," said Regina, pushing away the toys, and turning to Lord Oswestry, "one can't play in public."

"And you can't expect to be in private any more," he returned. "Wherever Miss Howard is" —

"There will the eagles be gathered together," she replied. "I don't quote irreverently. I mean what I say, — eagles, birds of prey."

"But they are not *all* eagles, Miss Howard."

"All *birds* are not eagles, I know," she retorted; "but all

the birds I am very likely to see about me are either eagles or vultures."

"That's the worst of a great fortune," he replied; "especially to a woman."

"I know I am out of my place here," she said; "it is your kindness and my lady's that gives me shelter for the present. I shall always be grateful to you — at a distance; but, as soon as I am of age, I shall creep into humble life again."

"And do you think that, with your fine fortune, you will be allowed to slip out of sight?"

"I do; when people are quite sure it is not to be had," she said with a smile that he could not quite make out.

"Are we not to have any music?" asked Lady Oswestry. "Henry, I wish you would take Miss Howard to the piano; and beg Miss Carleton to give us that pretty air from the new opera; and, Mrs. Falconer, how idle we all are! I thought we were to get up that quintet some evening."

Lord Henry began to rouse himself slowly up from his cushions. Lord Oswestry gave Regina his arm.

"I think I may as well save him the trouble," he said.

"Thank you — I am so glad!" cried Regina.

"What! don't you admire the irresistible Henry Montresor?" he asked with a smile.

"Not at all."

"Don't you think him handsome?"

"Oh, yes! — that forces itself on one's notice when a person has no other attraction."

He looked delighted, as men always do, when a woman abuses one of their one sex.

"Miss Howard is singular in everything," said Lord Oswestry, as he led her into the music-room; "singularly charming."

"How good you are!" she said. "I am constantly shocked at my own sayings and doings; but you keep your promise, and excuse me."

Her crapé skirt caught against the pedals of Lady Oswestry's harp, and as she paused while her companion disengaged it, she heard Lord Henry—who was opening the piano for Miss Carleton—whisper to her,—

“Well, are you contented with me?”

And Edith, with an expression of the deepest gratitude in her innocent eyes, replied, “Oh! I am so thankful to you—words cannot express.”

And then she bent over her music, occupied in finding the song Lady Oswestry had been asking about.

“One really should not judge anybody harshly,” Regina thought, as Lord Henry sauntered back to his sofa in the drawing-room; “he is just the sort of man I should have suspected of wanting Beyminstre, and yet he is not a bit more civil to me than he is to Miss Hopper. Perhaps he is really attached to Edith—I should not wonder—I never saw such a lovely face! And such soft, appealing manners! Yes, Edith, I am quite ready; is this to be our duet?”

“I do not know, Henry, what you are about,” said Lady Oswestry, when her cousin resumed his seat beside her; “time passes, and there are half a dozen men already hovering about her. Though Sir Alban, to do him justice, seems to have no views in that quarter.”

“If he had, I declare I would not stand in his way,” said Lord Henry. “He has the best right to the place.”

“The place?”

“Beyminstre.”

“On my word she is too good for you.”

“I am quite aware of it.”

“And your debts?”

“You do well to remind me—they must be considered—but I have my plan.”

“Is it included in your plan that you should turn the head of my foolish little governess?”

"What an idea! A little common civility; such as ought to be more generally paid to women in her class."

"When they are pretty, I suppose."

"I don't think her so very pretty. You know, 'Violet, the style of beauty that alone can influence my feelings. I do not change."

"How foolish you are!" said Lady Oswestry, the scarlet spot deepening on her cheek. "We have both grown old and wise since that time."

The duet was now finished, and as the book of the *Nozze di Figaro* was still on the desk, Lord Oswestry entreated Regina to sing the *Dove sono*, which she did so admirably as to delight him; and two or three gentlemen who were standing round the piano, and who did not know "*Dove sono*" from the Old Hundredth, were equally warm in their praises.

Regina glided out of the music-room, followed by Lord Exmoor, who never left her if he could help it, and she was soon kneeling on the hearth-rug, sticking paper quills from the alumet jars all over one of Lady Oswestry's black and tan spaniels.

"Look, Lady Oswestry! I've made such a capital porcupine," she cried; "look, Exmoor, before they fall out!"

Lady Oswestry came to look and laugh at the transformation of Chiffe; and then, wishing to bring Lord Henry forward, she said, turning to him, —

"That was a charming air Miss Howard sang last."

"Miss Howard? really. I did not know she sang!" he replied, looking quite surprised.

"My dear Henry, I cannot compliment you on the acuteness of your ear. I suppose you don't see the difference between Miss Howard's voice and Miss Carleton's. I say, Regina, Henry thought Miss Carleton did all that duet, 'Sull' aria,' by herself. He did not even know you sung."

"I dare say not, — I never sung to *him*," said Regina,

replacing the quills which kept falling out of Chiffe's silken coat, with such an unconcerned expression that Lord Henry, with all his vanity, could not believe it feigned.

It discomposed his plan a little. He had intended to pique Regina as a preliminary step, and he thought he was getting on admirably. But, if she was not to be piqued, he must really be at the trouble of making love to her; and there is no doubt he felt himself very ill-used by the discovery.

It sometimes crosses the minds of simple folks that to be straightforward is much less fatiguing than to play the knave. Lord Henry was undoubtedly very fond of his ease, — but perhaps, as he lay among the sofa cushions, he was not altogether free from care. There was Lady Oswestry, whom he had once loved, Edith Carleton, whom he loved now, and Regina Howard, whom he could not do without, — all under the same roof, and it suited his purposes to keep fair with them all.

And, as if he had not enough women on his hands at once, the fair Winny now popped herself on a chair close to his head, and began to improve the occasion by asking him, while she looked sweetly down upon his handsome features, "What were his views?"

He opened his eyes wide at this address, and then, struck by the oddity of her dress and figure, he sat up, returned her *aillades* with interest, and replied, —

"Oh, nothing but pencil sketches."

"Henry draws *so* well, Miss Hopper," said Lady Oswestry, willing to punish him for the little scrap of attention she had seen him pay to the governess, — "you should get him to show you his views in Wales."

And, rather to her ladyship's surprise, Lord Henry got up, drew a chair to the table, and in reply to Winny's delighted exclamation, said, "He should be very happy if Miss Hopper liked to look over his scrawls, — he might be

useful in explaining where anything was too obscure, and mention what were meant for trees, and what were mountains."

How she laughed, how her eyes twinkled, how she darted her forefinger with little jerks at every corner of the sketches. And then, after a short conversation about drawing, it was quite easy for her to bring back the discourse to her first intention, and ask Lord Henry what *were really* his views upon Church subjects in these divided times. She hoped he was not a sad Tractarian, — she had known instances, which she deeply mourned, of error indulged till it led the unhappy subject of it to the Papal see!

"On my word that's not a bad move," remarked Lord Henry, who imagined Miss Hopper meant that somebody had been made Pope in consequence of his secession from Protestantism. "There are few things I should like better than to sit on the throne of St. Peter. If you have any interest, Miss Hopper, among the cardinals, I hope you will allow me to bespeak it for the next vacancy."

"Naughty Lord Henry!" cried Winny, looking at him affectionately. "I don't know what to say to you."

Regina and Lady Oswestry were both in fits of laughter, their heads close together, and sheltered behind her ladyship's gorgeous fan. Sir Alban laughed too, and went up to the table to look at the drawings.

"These are capital!" he said. "I have half a mind to try the pencil, but I have always fancied water-color more expeditious. You get in the distance so quickly."

"But there's the trouble," returned Lord Henry; "a box of colors is absolute luggage, — and then you can't do without water, — besides the bore of rubbing your colors; now I can write off a sketch as I would a letter." •

"Alban made some beautiful sketches in Egypt," said Lord Oswestry, "and I am quite of his mind about color; even a good engraving hardly pleases me."

"I think color more attractive than form," said Lord Henry, "and therefore I am not properly sensible of the charms of sculpture."

"I have no such penchant for colors," said Sir Alban, "and use them merely as expressing a landscape more readily than simple light and shade; it requires a master's hand to make so much of black and white."

"By the way, talking of drawings," exclaimed Lord Henry, starting up; "when are our next tableaux to come off?"

"Why, next week we have a dreadfully dull party; that would be a good opportunity, would it not, Mrs. Falconer?"

"The very thing; who is your party?"

"Oh, don't ask. Some tenants of Lord Oswestry, who have taken Fairlight Hall; Scotch people. Mac — you need not laugh, Regina, it is really their name — Macgilliscuddy! And the Lawlers, Sir John and his mother, and that sort of people, you know."

"How I wish we had something new!" exclaimed Lady Oswestry.

"We had tableaux last time," said Lord Henry.

"And charades when we were here in September," remarked Mrs. Falconer.

"And I do believe we have acted every proverb in the language," said Lady Oswestry.

"Have you tried the tableaux charades, such as they play in Germany?" asked Regina, timidly.

"My dearest creature, I never heard of them," cried Lady Oswestry; "tell me all about it."

"Simply that, instead of a dialogue, you have a picture to represent each syllable; and the closing one illustrates the whole word."

"Ten thousand thanks! What a treasure you are! This is a novelty! Lady Pentland has not got this kind of tableaux. Come, now, what word shall we have?"

"Miss Howard should be mistress of the revels," said Lord Oswestry.

"No, indeed," said Regina; "I am quite ignorant of these things. I never even saw a tableau; it was my German master who mentioned this amusement to me, as illustrative of the number of compound words in his language."

"I am wild to put it in practice," said Lady Oswestry; "but we must form a committee, and the rest are to know nothing about it. Sir Alban, I am sure you won't desert me?"

"I am at your service, Lady Oswestry, at any time, if you will promise not to put me in your tableaux. You may employ me in historical researches for your costumes, or in painting your scenes, or designing groups."

"We shall find you plenty to do," she replied; "and you, Regina, you *must* appear."

"I had rather not," she said in a low tone; "I know you will manage for me; and I cannot be wanted."

"Very well, I know, now, you have an idea; what word were you thinking of?"

"You must tell me if it could be represented," she replied, withdrawing a little from the circle as she spoke.

They stood, together conversing in whispers. Winny screwed up her eyes, and sat watching them; and glancing every now and then at Sir Alban, who seemed to follow their movements with a look of grave inquietude.

"I am delighted with Miss Howard's idea," said Lord Oswestry after a few minutes. "Let me know who are the initiated, that I may not be indiscreet. The children will be wanted."

"I hope you will make me of use, Lady Oswestry," cried Winny.

"You must ask Henry, Miss Hopper," said her ladyship; "there he is consulting with Miss Howard and my lord."

Lord Oswestry had just rung for a large portfolio stand

to be brought from the library, and he was showing some engravings to Miss Howard. Lord Henry, leaning over her familiarly, whispered his criticisms into her ear. And it may be taken as a sign of very imperfect breeding, when a man (as Lord Henry always did) plunges from the rudest indifference to a freedom of address that can only be tolerated in a very near relation.

"I am come to help; you must find me a little part; I don't care how little!" cried Winny, capering and skirmishing round the portfolio.

Lord Henry stared at her, and began to laugh; Lord Oswestry said coolly, "You are very obliging, Miss Hopper."

But he did not know Winny. She meant to be in the tableaux. It was not worth considering whether her host and hostess had other views.

"There's a figure at the side that would do for me," she said. "I won't take the centre of the group; but you will want accessories. I should not mind being an old woman."

"You can't be a *young* woman," muttered Lord Henry in an aside to Regina. She bent down her head laughing. When she looked up, Sir Alban was standing close to her. He did not say anything, but he supported the heavy leaf of the portfolio, which she had been holding up, and which Lord Henry, with his selfish want of gallantry, had not noticed. His hands almost touched hers, which she quietly withdrew without haste, as she thanked him for his assistance; and, upon Lord Henry addressing him about the costume of a print they were looking at, she relinquished her place, and returned to Lady Oswestry.

A day or two afterward, she was coming downstairs when she met Lord Oswestry.

"I was looking for you, Miss Howard," he said; "I have something to tell you."

"Have you seen Lord Henry?" she asked. "All the

groups are settled ; only we are going to change the attitude in that frightful picture by Haydon."

"Oh ! this is something infinitely more important than a tableau," he returned with mock solemnity.

"You can't interest me," she said, laughing. "I have nothing to fear and nothing to hope, unless you should find out that Beyminstre had disappeared from the face of the earth."

"You are a very remarkable young lady," said Lord Oswestry ; "you must prepare, however, to be very much overcome. Sir John Lawler has just declared himself a suitor for your hand."

"Sir John Lawler ? Is that the one with red hair ?"

"No, no ! Lawler has black hair ; you are thinking of Mr. Poole."

"Oh, Mr. Poole is the red-haired man. I knew it was one of them. It's your fault, Lord Oswestry ; you introduced them both together, and I don't know them apart. No, thank you—of course. Oh ! I don't want to see his letter."

"Will you come into the billiard-room ? You will not be able to go out this rainy morning."

"If you please ; shall we find any one there ?"

"Lord Henry and Miss Carleton, with the children."

Regina gave him a pained, unquiet look.

"Oh, I agree with you !" he said ; "it is very unwise ; nothing can be more so."

"And will you put an end to it ?"

"My dear Miss Howard, I have nothing to do with the governess. Lady Oswestry manages her share of the domestic concerns, and I mine ; and it is well understood that we don't interfere with each other."

Regina gave a little gesture of the head, which plainly said, "I shall not take things quite so coolly."

"You will act a very kind part by that young person," he

said, "if you will convince her that his attentions will do her no credit. I should be sorry that any young lady, in whose welfare I felt an interest, should accept from Henry Montresor addresses much more serious than those which he is likely to offer to a governess."

Edith was at the billiard-table, trying to mediate between Clara and her brother, who were pelting each other with the balls.

"He began it." "No, she did." "No, I tell you, it was when you were standing at the window with cousin Henry." "She scratched me first with a pin!" "I could not help that; you seized my frock; I did not know the pin was there."

Lord Henry stood laughing at them. Edith, with crimsoned cheeks, seemed to be quite borne down by the violence of her little pupils.

"This wont do," thought Regina; "and her pupils are fortunately above her control. The best plan for her will be, to look out directly for another situation."

CHAPTER VII.



WONDER if anybody here can tell me how long it takes a person to cover twenty-eight small testaments with canvas?" asked Lady Oswestry, looking round on the party assembled about the library-table the next morning, including all but Winny, who had walked down to the school, in a heavy fall of snow, immediately after breakfast.

Nobody seemed to have an idea.

"I merely want to know," continued her ladyship, "be-

cause; as long as those twenty-eight testaments hold out, it is clear that Miss Hopper is a fixture. Now, she has been here ten days, and, though she may be useful, she is not exactly ornamental."

"How can you say so, Violet?" exclaimed Lord Henry. "I declare I think her a very striking woman. You forget her tail-coat. If her maid would only sew on a couple of buttons behind, I would wear it myself at the next ball you give."

"I saw she was making an impression upon Henry the other evening," remarked Lady Oswestry.

"It is not that I am exactly in love with her," he returned; "but I have such a warm regard for old family acquaintances. Now she says her father was very intimate with my grandfather, the old Lord Shields."

"Why, you know that's quite impossible," said Lady Oswestry. "Grandpapa intimate with a man like that!"

"I would not tell lies if I set up for a saint!" cried Mrs. Falconer, contemptuously.

"You ladies are so severe upon each other!" retorted Lord Henry. "Now I have the highest opinion of Miss Hopper's integrity. Poor grandpapa used to be *very* intimate with his servants; hadn't he a butler named Hopper, or a footman?"

"Poor, dear grandpapa!" said Lady Oswestry. "How kind he used to be to us children! Don't you remember, when he was in town for Christmas, how he used to take us to the toyman's in North Audley street, wasn't it — or Mad-dox street?"

"To be sure, Violet! There it was! — I have it!" cried Lord Henry, starting up.

"What? where? you quite frighten me."

"The toyshop! don't you remember? Hopper! How often he used to say, 'Well, Hopper, here I am again, — these little folks are bent upon ruining me;' and don't you

know when he used to pretend he had no more money, and old Hopper used to say, 'Oh, my lord, that's of no consequence, your lordship,' and grin; and grandpapa would say, 'I wish everybody was of your opinion, Mr. Hopper.'

Lady Oswestry and Regina were in fits of laughter.

"I recollect him as well," said Lady Oswestry, "as I do anybody. He had those manners! It was, 'What will your little ladyship like?' and 'Is not that a pretty toy, your little lordship?' You watch Miss Hopper trying to ingratiate herself with Violet; she's very like her father."

"How I will draw her out about her father!" cried Lord Henry. "I'm quite impatient to see her again."

"I know, mamma, how Miss Hopper comes to be here," said Lady Violet, who had been sent for by her mother to speak about her costumes, and then forgotten.

Everybody was eager to hear what Violet had to say; she looked extremely scornful and disgusted, and went on coldly.

"Mrs. Chillingworth's maid told Laurette, that one day her mistress was very much vexed about a bill she had to pay, of twenty-seven pounds thirteen and eightpence. Then Mrs. Chillingworth's maid said, that her mistress was so harassed, for the tradesman was very rude in insisting on his money, that her mistress was in tears; and Miss Hopper, being shown in, promised to give her the sum if she was permitted to accompany Mrs. Chillingworth to Piermont."

"And now we know exactly the price of a ticket of admission to Piermont!" laughed Mrs. Falconer.

"I think I'll stipulate that I am to go halves, next time," said Lady Oswestry. "A little ready money never comes amiss."

"Then this Miss Hopper is a fortune, I suppose?" said Lord Henry.

"I wonder if she plays *écarté*!" exclaimed Captain Falconer.

"Miss Hopper used to think cards very wicked," said Regina; "but her views are apt to change, and, though I should call her very well off, I dare say that you grand people would say she was little better than a pauper."

"You, indeed!" said Lady Oswestry, laughing; "why, you are richer than any of us!"

"I *was* not," said Regina; "we lived in a little house with two maid-servants, and I was always very happy," and her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Nature never intended you for such a position, my dear," said Lady Oswestry gayly. "Some people are born great."

"I am not of the number," she answered, regaining her composure as she spoke. "I am fond of quiet. I suppose I am not very strong."

"Then I am sure you have no business walking out with the children in such weather," cried Lady Oswestry.

"And I for one announce that if Miss Howard goes, I go too," said Lord Henry. "I am sure she requires somebody to protect her from the attentions of my cousin Exmoor."

"I like his attentions," she retorted.

"Such frankness is very praiseworthy," said Mrs. Falconer, laughing.

"And I like walking alone with Miss Carleton and the children," she added with emphasis.

"Henry thinks frankness may be carried too far," laughed Lady Oswestry.

What he thought, Regina did not pause to inquire; she merely took care to start with Edith at a time when she had just seen Lord Henry, with a cigar in his mouth, going with two or three of the gentlemen in the direction of the stables.

It was so cold that the children were glad to run forward with their hoops, and Regina was equally glad to seize the opportunity of speaking to Miss Carleton. She began with

a little tremor in her voice. "Edith, I am older than you; will you let me speak to you as a friend?"

Miss Carleton blushed easily; she was crimson to the temples before Regina had done speaking; but she said, cordially, "I shall be very much obliged to you."

"That means, you know, always, — let me say something disagreeable," pursued Regina, trying to speak lightly; "that is the privilege of friends. I can't help thinking that the children here are more than you can manage."

"They are indeed!" said Edith, and her face brightened as if she had expected quite a different subject to be broached. "I do think, — for amiable, engaging children as they really are (I mean the two younger ones), — they are very naughty. It is not only that they fight at a minute's notice, but when they do not like to do their lessons, they will not."

"But then, my dear Edith, don't you think that you had better relinquish this situation for one in which you could be more influential? Where the children are older, for instance."

"You see, Regina, when Lady Oswestry engaged me, she told me that my singing was such an object, she cared very little about my powers of teaching, if I would but keep them out of mischief, — which I do in a measure. Lord Exmoor has two hours twice a week of the curate, Mr. Best, and Violet is most diligent with her music, so that I do not feel quite thrown away."

"The fact is, Edith, to speak without reserve, I do not think Piermont a very safe place for pretty people or for rich people," she added, laughing; "there are so many gentlemen coming and going. I shall be very glad when my time comes to withdraw to the old house on the common again."

"I think you have guessed, — I think you have in your mind," — Edith faltered.

"It has occurred to me," said Regina, looking another way, "that you have no female friend here to screen you from attentions that may mean nothing, or to warn you that you may lose your peace of mind, while a more worldly person would derive from the same cause only a few weeks' amusement."

"Ah! you don't know him," cried Miss Carleton, with fervor. "He is incapable of trifling with any one. He has said to me, that before everything he holds a woman's feelings as sacred."

"It sounds very well," said Regina; "but, having said so much, I think he ought to say more."

"He has said he is poor, — that he cannot consult his own wishes, — at least, that he must wait. Dear Regina, do think well of him."

"I shall be very glad to do so," she replied; "but, dear Edith, your position is a very delicate one. Forgive me if I say that you had better leave Piermont. You can *wait* at a distance, as well as here, — in many respects, believe me, much better."

"I — I'll think it over — I'll consult *him*," said Edith; "indeed, except you, I have no one else to consult. I have now no relations unless I may call Mr. Morley one, and he is living at Milan with his family."

"He ought to make you an allowance!" exclaimed Regina. "He must be very rich, and he managed to secure all your mother's fortune."

"He does allow me five-and-twenty pounds a year," returned Edith.

"Pitiful creature!" cried Regina.

"Do you know, Regina, I was so frightened when I heard you were coming on purpose for Lord Henry," said Edith. "I knew your fortune would be so acceptable to his family. They all wish him to marry an heiress. And you know he is so handsome."

"Very," said Regina dryly; "but notwithstanding his beauty, my dear Edith, people have different tastes, and mine does not do homage to Lord Henry."

"But you must like him. Think what a fortune yours is! — and to relinquish that for *my* sake, — I, who have nothing in the world."

"My dear Edith, before he can relinquish Beyminstre for any motive, he must stand some chance of obtaining it. Now it so happens that my opinions on these subjects were very early decided. I shall never marry, — not even Lord Henry."

"How happy you make me!" cried Edith; "because I well know that money is not your only attraction. Every one is talking of your grace and beauty; and then your singing, it is much better than mine; and your accomplishments. Lord Oswestry, who is scarcely ever pleased, is charmed with *you*."

"You will make me vain, Edith," said Regina, smiling; "but do not forget my advice; consult yourself, not Lord Henry. No man is capable of advising a woman on a point of delicacy. Consider that a marriage with Lord Henry would not be agreeable to his family; as far as we can judge it would be anything but pleasant to Lady Oswestry, under whose roof you both are; and remember, he has not yet asked you to be his wife, though it appears he has hinted his regret that he cannot do so. Don't you think, under these circumstances, you would be better away? I am not giving you empty advice; I offer you a home at any time, for as long as you please, at my cottage at Holmwood, where my old trusty servants will take every care of you."

"Dear Regina, you are indeed a friend. Some day I may thankfully avail myself of your kindness; but just now I cannot leave Piermont; things are not decided, but they may be arranged sooner than you think for."

"Well, Edith," said Regina, as the children joined them; "only do not let it be too late."

The party at dinner was very small that day, and, as they were waiting in the drawing-room before dinner, Lady Oswestry called her cousin to her side.

"We are quite *sans façon* to-day, Henry," she said; "you can take Miss Howard in to dinner."

"Thank you all the same. I am going to indulge my feelings for once, and offer my arm to the toyman's daughter. I never did such a thing before."

"Don't be ridiculous, Henry. I think the woman has bewitched you."

"To a certain extent she has: her eyes are irresistible."

So they went in to dinner together. Winny squeaking like a guinea-pig with glee at walking arm in arm with a lord, sitting next him, and attended to as if she was a duchess.

Lord Henry's attentions were indeed very marked; he had not taken charge of Winny for nothing; he now set to work with the determined purpose of making her tipsy. He pledged her in champagne, and then insisted on her trying the sparkling Moselle; he made her drain a bumper of old Madeira, and then almost forced upon her an enormous glass of Amontillado. At every fresh twinkle of her eyes, Lady Oswestry shook from head to foot with suppressed laughter; Captain and Mrs. Falconer exchanged glances; and Lord Oswestry looked rather astonished, and tried to make the conversation general.

They were all talking and laughing about the new novel, *The Ward of Thorpe Combe*, which was just out, and which everybody was reading eagerly.

"It is the best novel I ever read," said Lord Henry; "there is no love in it (worth mentioning) and that is new at any rate, in a world where, they tell us, there's nothing new."

"I did not know that was a merit in your eyes," said Lady Oswestry, satirically.

"I think the heroine so disagreeable," exclaimed Mrs. Falconer; "now, really, one meets enough disagreeable people in the world, one expects something a little charming in a novel."

"It kept me up half the night I know," said Lord Oswestry, "till I should not have been sorry to drop in upon one of the heiress's little suppers."

"I tried to get up an interest in the story," said Sir Alban; "but it would not do. I cannot see the merit of a delineation of low cunning and its success, which, after all, any paltry attorney could surpass."

"Why, certainly, these small vices are not poetical," said Lord Henry.

"And the author seems to have committed the mistake of administering poetical justice at the end," said Sir Alban; "one would think she did not know the world. Fraud always answers."

"Not always," interposed Miss Hopper, with her head extremely on one side, and that barley-sugar expression in her eyes that Lady Oswestry delighted to counterfeit; "but I think," she added, glancing at Regina, "that we had better change the subject at present; we have all many temptations and many besetting sins, you know; and we can't tell what we should do in the same situation; people will do a great deal to get possession of a great estate."

Winnie threw her eyes and her words so decidedly at Regina during this exordium, that her meaning could not fail to strike every one round the table. Sir Alban turned quickly from Winnie to Miss Howard, took her meaning suddenly, and colored deeply, as if, Regina thought, he was ashamed to have his own suspicions put into words. But on the beautiful transparent paleness of her features not the slightest tinge was discernible. Her finely carved lips con-

tracted with scorn, to which all words would have been weak; and from the depths of her splendid eyes, light flashed quick as the bolt from the thunder-cloud on Miss Hopper's devoted head; then turning calmly to Lord Oswestry she said, —

"I am more interested in every chapter. I hope, Lord Oswestry, that you don't forget you promised me the third volume as soon as you had finished it."

"I am keeping it for you," he said, with his peculiar smile, which she always liked, because it reminded her of what Alban used to be. "I hope you will be taken in, as I was, by the catastrophe."

"Oh, don't tell me!" exclaimed Regina.

Meantime, Lord Henry plied Winny with glass after glass, till, I am sorry to say, she began to feel the effects, and to display them too, by making such affectionate use of her eyes to her neighbors, that it was very difficult for the rest of the company to preserve their gravity; except Lord Oswestry, who was not disposed to look favorably upon any joke of Lord Henry's, and who thought the whole proceeding very annoying, and very ill-timed.

"No, I won't, Lord Henry! naughty man, I will not!" exclaimed Winny, withdrawing her glass at dessert from the decanter which he approached to it.

"This is a new kind of sherry," he urged; "you ought to taste this, Miss Hopper; only half a glass."

"Bad man!" said Winny, allowing him to gain his point, and giving him a pat on the arm which sent Lady Oswestry almost into hysterics.

Lord Oswestry could bear it no longer.

"I think, Lady Oswestry," he said, "if you mean to rehearse your groups this evening, you will not have too much time; perhaps (with a severe glance toward Winny), perhaps you had better move."

"I'm quite ready," said her ladyship, inclining her head to the ladies; "only I don't wish to hurry any one."

"Are you coming?" asked Winny, gazing at Lord Henry.

"Presently," he returned; "and I hope you will sing me that song you promised."

Winny followed behind Mrs. Falconer, but pushed herself before Regina in a great hurry, exclaiming,—

"I'm the eldest of us two girls!"

"Poor Henry!" whispered Lady Oswestry to Regina; "I dare say my lord is making himself as disagreeable as possible to him, just for this little bit of fun, as if it mattered when we were alone; for I don't call the Falconers any one. And she surpassed herself,—didn't she, my love? That last look!"

"Indeed, Lady Oswestry, I was so shocked that I hardly knew how to sit at table. It is so dreadful for a woman to drink too much."

"Dear, I thought it very amusing; but what is the matter now? I say, Regina, she is crying!"

"People sometimes do, I have heard, when they have taken more than they ought," said Regina.

It was too true; the large tears were rolling down Winny's placid face, not a feature of which betrayed emotion.

On reaching the drawing-room, she had made up to the children, who were always there of an evening; but Lady Violet had turned her back upon her, and had said to her sister,—

"You should not speak to that woman, Clara; she has no business to be here."

At this rebuff, Winny, after crying a little while, shot up into her own room; and soon afterward the gentlemen entered, and Regina saw Lord Oswestry go solemnly up to his lady.

"That person must be got rid of, Lady Oswestry," he said; "she made herself very conspicuous at dinner."

"*That person* is doubtless Miss Hopper," returned her ladyship; "but I may just hint to the present company, that it was not *I* who asked her to prolong her stay at Piermont."

There was an irony in Lady Oswestry's manner when she pleased that chafed Regina, and, it is possible, might chafe her lord; for he looked much annoyed, and said, "She made several remarks that were in the worst possible taste, as she seemed to have some person present in view."

"Oh, she meant *me*, Lord Oswestry," cried Regina; "but I am used to her. Pray, don't banish her from her paradise on my account. Don't mind me."

"Indeed, Miss Howard," he said, his tone quite changing, "I do mind you very much; I don't choose you to be annoyed at my table. Besides which, it occurred to me that she made a little too free, — that she, in fact," —

"*Elle s'était grisée un peu*, — the confession sounds better in French," retorted Lady Oswestry; "but we *all* have our little weaknesses."

She pointed this speech at her lord quite as much as Winny had pointed hers at Regina.

"However," she added, "as I should rather like to clear her out before we have our *tableaux*, I will dismiss the good woman. I suppose you will not object to my inventing a civil reason?"

"Just as you please," he replied coldly.

Lady Oswestry sat musing and looking very mischievous for a little while, and then rose idly and went out of the room.

Regina went among the children as usual, where Edith sat with her crochet-work. Lord Henry did not come near them; he was flirting with Mrs. Falconer. Miss Carleton kept watching them with suspended breath, and a cheek

that grew paler and paler. Presently Lord Oswestry came to ask Regina to look at a water-color sketch that he had placed on a small reading-desk for her to see. It represented a scene in Egypt,—one of the strange groups of gigantic statues which are found at a little distance from the banks of the Nile, but which at certain seasons are unapproachable from the sandy plains where they stand, being inundated by the rise of the river. The hot, angry sky and the water around their bases contrasted well with the grand, calm expression of these curious remains.

Lord Oswestry gave her a chair, and stood leaning behind it while he talked.

“And who is the artist?” asked Regina.

“My cousin Willingham. I had some difficulty in getting this out of him,—for, whether it is pride or humility I know not, but he is very shy about his sketches.”

“But surely this is very beautiful!”

“I think so; he says it is a daub.”

“I wish to ask you,” said Regina, turning back in her chair, “whether *I* could travel in Egypt, with propriety, when I come of age?”

“Miss Howard can make it a condition that her wedding tour should be to Egypt.”

“But, putting aside wedding tours and all that nonsense, which is never going to happen,” cried Regina, “could a staid single woman take the proper servants and interpreters, and travel through some parts of Egypt, or could she not?”

“I should think a beautiful young woman had better join some party about to travel. Such a thing is very easy to find.”

“I could not bear that. If I were to call myself Mrs. Howard, could I? Where would be the danger? The Bedouin Arabs would not attack me if I had a proper escort. The Pasha of Egypt would not want my money, as these

smooth gentlemen do; and, besides that, I want to go to Iceland!"

"You are insatiable, Miss Howard; but I should recommend such a charming young widow to stay quietly at home for another ten or fifteen years. Alban, we are discussing your painting; it has given this young lady a sudden passion for travelling."

"The country is worth seeing, which is more than I could say for my sketch," replied Sir Alban, coldly.

"Miss Howard thinks it beautiful," said Lord Oswestry; "and I understand that her opinion is worth having, for her own drawings are full of talent."

"I am the more surprised at your skill," said Regina, determined to speak, "since I never heard Mrs. Willingham mention even that you drew, and she was not apt to be silent on your merits."

"It is only of late years that I have taken it up," he said; "but I had been accustomed to military drawing, and I found these rough sketches, such as they are, easy enough."

"I think," said Regina, turning to look at the drawing again, "that you inherit your mother's talent."

"Ah!" said Lord Oswestry, "you heard of him pretty often, I dare say."

"Very often," she replied; "but, as I told you, I think, this is not the first time I have seen Sir Alban—he was twice at Dykeham."

"True!" said his lordship with a laugh; "you recalled the acquaintance when he seemed to have forgotten it. How any one could forget *you*, I am at a loss to imagine; but if I were you I would never forgive him."

"Neyer!" said Regina, looking up at Lord Oswestry and laughing, while she could feel her own heart beat; "women never do! Is not it Sam Slick who says, 'If there is a creetur' who never forgives, it is a woman?'"

"And a parson," added his lordship laughing on; "they are still worse."

"Oh, fie, Lord Oswestry," she cried.

"I am only quoting," he answered; "don't make me answerable for the sins of Judge Haliburton."

CHAPTER VIII.



AND how do you think I managed?" asked Lady Oswestry, dropping down beside Regina as soon as the chair was vacant.

"I have been wondering," she replied.

"Don't breathe a word to any living creature," said her ladyship, beginning to laugh, "and I'll tell you. I told her that Henry was in love with her!"

"My dear Lady Oswestry!"

"I did! if you could have heard the nonsense I talked, you would have given me credit for a quick invention. I said that Oswestry was his guardian, — when he has a father living, you know, and besides is twenty-eight years old; and I told her, that my lord intended him to make another match, and that he desired her to leave Piermont directly. She cried abundantly; but I could see she was so delighted with her conquest, she quite felt it an honor to be turned out of Piermont for his sake. She goes to-morrow early. Ah, Regina! I know who Henry really does love; but he is full of delicacy, — he knows he is poor, and he dreads the idea of being thought mercenary; in such a case as his, it is generous in the lady to make a little advance."

"If she share his sentiments, certainly," said Regina.

"I do hope with all my heart that you have no idea of Alban

Willingham," said Lady Oswestry, very earnestly; "not that *I* dislike him,—for I think these cold, proud people rather pleasant,—but it would so please my lord if he were to succeed."

"I acquit him of trying, at any rate," said Regina; "and I should think you might acquit me, too, in that quarter."

Now, as Winny did really leave Piermont the next morning, not exactly with drums beating and colors flying, but in rather a sneaking kind of manner, those who did not know her might have thought that she would have refrained ever after from boasting of her visit to the Oswestrys. But those people did not know her, indeed! I believe nobody from that day forth ever spent an hour in Miss Hopper's company without being entertained with anecdotes of the whole Oswestry family, and all their guests, besides being instructed in all the customs of Piermont, as much as if it were a new island discovered in the South Seas.

To her intimate friends she said, that Lady Oswestry had wished her to spend the whole winter there; but that, having unfortunately made a conquest of a young marquis staying in the house, she had thought it right to go away at once, for the naughty man would *not* take a refusal! To Mr. Brand she said, that she could not stay away longer from her dear Holmwood duties. In fact, she managed to tell the story in every quarter very much to her own advantage; and she bought a quantity of smart clothes, greatly to the astonishment of her mamma, in which she sat waiting day after day for Lord Henry, for she expected that he would not take Lord Oswestry's cruel decision so quietly as he did. So much mischief may be done by a foolish jest!—for though Winny was over forty, she took the affair to heart like a girl of eighteen, and made herself very wretched and very ridiculous. ~

Regina was growing very fond of Lord Oswestry; he reminded her perpetually of what Alban used to be. His

footstep was so like, that she hardly ever distinguished which was coming. Sometimes her color would rise if she heard, as she thought, Sir Alban coming into the room, and it would turn out to be Lord Oswestry after all. Whenever Lord Oswestry came up to her chair, and stood looking down upon her with that kind, reserved smile that seemed as if it was not given to everybody, her eyes kindled with pleasure. She could always speak with much more ease to him than to his lady. She felt as if he understood her. Whenever she was ignorant of what she ought to do, even in a question of dress, she would waylay Lord Oswestry, and ask him, with that soft, ingenuous regard that delighted him, what he would recommend.

A day or two before the charade party she met him on the stairs, and shyly asked him if he thought she might still wear black crape, with black ornaments, when they had so many people.

"Nothing could be better," he returned; "but why don't you ask my lady?"

"Because I don't like to expose my ignorance to her."

"You don't care about me, then?"

"No, because you wont despise it so much."

Do you know that Lawler is coming? He says he will not give up all hope. He has not had a fair trial."

"As he pleases; but I want to ask you another thing. May I retire after the *tableaux*? Lady Oswestry talks of a quadrille party later in the evening, and I am not yet fit for gayety."

"You shall do just as you please. Keep in the shade as long as you can, 'Making a sunshine of a shady place,' which I take to be about as impossible an achievement as was ever put into verse."

"Now, I want something else!"

"Money?"

"Oh, no!"

"You are certainly the most moderate young heiress" —

"I have no right to be extravagant; I was frugally brought up."

By this time they had got to the bottom of the stairs, and were walking slowly across the hall.

"I should be so glad if, when you and my lady go out to pay your visits, you would leave me quietly here with Miss Carleton and the children. I am still in mourning, and I am not fit to go out."

The tears were standing in her eyes.

"I see you wish it," he said, "and you shall always do as you like here. It will be very dull for you; but, if you prefer dulness, I must reconcile Lady Oswestry to going without you."

"Ah! there she is, flirting with my lord," cried Mrs. Falconer, who was coming downstairs with Lady Oswestry, both in riding-habits; "we shall know where to look for her another time."

"She does not know how to flirt, poor soul!" said Lady Oswestry, taking Regina's arm. "Why don't you ride?"

"Because I have had a long walk already."

"Come and see me mount; I am going to try Sir Alban's Persian mare."

"Yes, Miss Howard; you must come and look at Moo-tee," said Lord Oswestry; and he went out with her into the portico, where she had the pleasure of seeing Sir Alban help Lady Oswestry to her horse, and stand arranging the folds of her habit with the greatest care, while Lord Henry performed the same office to Mrs. Falconer, with an off-hand careless manner that certainly did not savor of the times of Addison or Steele. Regina could not but look back to the days when she would not have believed any kind friend (say Winny) who had depicted a scene wherein she was standing by unnoticed, while Alban was paying attention to another woman.

"I have some energy left," she thought, as she stood with her eyes unconsciously fixed on Alban, leaning against Mootee's brilliant neck, and talking to Lady Oswestry. "I can live down a mistake." She fancied Alban watched her, as if to see how she liked the transfer of his attentions; but he had lost the power to wound her now. She smiled slightly as this thought struck her, and addressed some trifling remark to Lord Oswestry about the horses.

"How pensive we look," laughed Mrs. Falconer, pointing with her riding-whip to Regina; "I think we are jealous that we have not the offer of Mootee!"

Sir Alban looked hard at her, as if he wished to catch her eye and make her speak. She answered Mrs. Falconer with the same slight smile on her lips:—

"You are thinking of La Belle Stewart and the king's new coach; but the world has grown wiser since that time."

"Not the feminine-world, Miss Howard," called Lord Henry across Mrs. Falconer; "the ladies remain as they were before the flood."

"Are we going to ride to-day?" asked Lady Oswestry. And at this appeal they all started off.

Sir Alban turned and looked at Regina, as she stood beside Lord Oswestry,—the long folds of her rich silk dress sweeping the marble step of the Perron; her arms, in the tight sleeves so becoming to a slender figure, dropped easily before her; her hands slightly clasped together; the lines of her head and neck rivalling those of his beautiful horse in high-bred grace. She seemed to feel the cold, and passed before his lordship into the house again.

This little, harmless ride, on the first breaking up of the frost, was productive of one vexatious incident that Regina had not anticipated.

Mrs. Falconer came home with a toothache, and the next morning appeared with a swelled face. Lord Henry sat looking at her with unequivocal symptoms of dismay; for in

the next day's *tableau* she was to play *Margaret* to his *Faust*.

After breakfast he was seen whispering eagerly to Lord Oswestry, and presently the latter came up to Regina, and asked her if she would have any great objection to appearing in the second *tableau*; Mrs. Falconer had admitted that she was suffering too much to take so prominent a position.

"I—with my dark hair! My dear Lord Oswestry, I am glad I have a reason which prevents me from appearing disobliging — *Margaret must* have light hair!"

Lord Henry did not seem overwhelmed by her refusal; he admitted the truth of the observation, and, turning to Lady Oswestry, remarked carelessly, "I think your little governess would do, Violet; her hair would be just the right color."

Regina looked eagerly at Lord Oswestry, as if to beg that he would interfere, but he was silent. Lady Oswestry laughed rather ironically, but said she thought it was a good suggestion.

"Shall I go and propose it?" asked Lord Henry, with more interest than he was aware of.

"Thank you! I'll save you the trouble," returned her ladyship; "I am going to the school-room."

"And so am I," thought Regina; "and I will try if I can prevent it."

But it appeared that Lady Oswestry considered she had bought Miss Carleton for so much a year,—she announced to her that she was to stand for *Margaret*, laughed at her timid expression of repugnance, asked after Violet's music, and then left the room.

And now the eventful night is come. Invitations have been sent out far and near. A large room, used sometimes as a theatre, is prepared; a military band, belonging to a regiment in the neighborhood, composes the orchestra. The curtain is down in front of the stage—not a green curtain, but a beautiful landscape with pastoral figures, gilt and

blazoned like a fan. The guests are entering. Lord Oswestry has a great lady on his arm. At a respectful distance Regina is led in by Sir John Lawler, who takes the opportunity as they go upstairs to "hope that he is not disagreeable to her."

She replies frankly, "Not particularly; but she wishes to lead a single life."

The room is softly lit by ground-glass lamps, and the company are standing about in groups before the show begins.

The colonel of the regiment, who with some of his officers is invited, is quite frantic to be presented to Regina, for he is a single man; but he cannot get hold of Lord Oswestry, and he hardly knows any one else in the room. So, as he cannot speak to her, the next best thing is to stare at her, which he does heartily, as she stands, in her long black dress and crown of white roses, just beneath a cluster of lamps, looking as transparent and spiritual as she did (Sir Alban well remembers the time) when he walked home with her from Bradford, and she wore the wreath his mother's fingers had woven. Leaning on a chair, he gazed at her differently, but far more intently than the colonel.

"Is that the heiress?" asked an officer of a gentleman standing near. "She looks as if she was not long for this world. I should not wonder now if Willingham were to come into Beyminstre after all."

"How so?" inquired his companion.

"I bet you what you like she don't live to come of age, and then the estate goes to him as heir-at-law; for you know a minor can't make a will."

The gentleman, having a little more decency than his military friend, did not care to discuss the chances of the young lady's decease within a few feet of where she stood, fearing that she might, as indeed she did, hear every word they said. She happened at the moment to meet Sir Alban's look fixed on her, and she replied to it by a slight half mel-

ancholy smile, as if she thought such a solution of all her difficulties possible, and not much to be dreaded.

He started forward as if going to speak to her; but a sudden blast of horns from the band announced the opening of Mendelssohn's wedding-march, and warned the company to take their places.

And now the curtain rises upon a dazzling group of wax-work, so still, so brightly colored, so softened by the white tarlatan stretched in front of the scene, that Regina is obliged to collect her thoughts before she can believe that she is looking at living people with whom she mixes every day.

In front of a low cottage, close to the sea-shore and backed by rugged cliffs, a beautiful woman in peasant costume is seated making lace. One lovely child, her hands clasped behind her, is standing at her mother's knee, watching the progress of the bobbins; the other little fairy, seated on the ground, is playing with a heap of shells. A fisherman half-way up the rocks is turning as if to bid adieu to his family, while a boy in sailor costume is collecting the nets at the doorway.

The brilliant light steeps all as in a halo of sunshine; Lady Oswestry's arms look like alabaster, her hair shines like satin, her eyes sparkle like rain-drops in the sun. The ladies cannot contain their admiration of Lord Henry, — of his splendid complexion, his gallant bearing, his enormous fisherman's boots. Regina wonders with all her might how the children can keep so still, and it is with a pang of regret that she sees the curtain descend on the group. M. Le Fevre advances in a storm of applause to the foot-lights, and mentions in an apologetic tone, peculiar to himself, that the first two syllables have been represented.

"It is rather a trick we have played them," said Regina, as Lord Oswestry made his way in front of her chair.

"So much the better. How do you like it?"

"Oh, it is beautiful beyond description! I had no idea a tableau could be so attractive; I thought they were taking a great deal more trouble than it was worth; but I was quite wrong."

Here the colonel made a frantic plunge at Lord Oswestry, and whispered a request that he might be presented to Miss Howard; which his lordship did, and that eager officer, turning round in his chair, to the great inconvenience of his neighbors, fixed his fierce eyes upon Regina, and began at once.

"Pretty scene they've given us," he said.

Regina acquiesced.

"Do you know the word?"

"I am one of the initiated," she replied.

"Give us a hint, Miss Howard," urged Sir John Lawler on the other side.

She shook her head; and presently the curtain rose again.

The stage is dark; an iron lamp hanging from the roof of a dungeon scarcely illumines the scene.

It is the last outline from Retsch's *Faust*. Margaret stands in the centre, almost covered with her dishevelled golden hair—her arms uplifted—her appealing face raised to heaven. Faust, all entreaty, endeavors gently to force her to leave her prison. Mephistopheles, seizing the arm of Faust, warns him that his time is expired, and that he must leave Margaret to her fate.

There was a general exclamation at the touching beauty of Margaret. Lord Henry, resplendent in velvet and ostrich plumes, was declared to be handsomer than ever. Captain Falconer looked, and possibly felt, exactly like Mephistopheles.

But Edith was the theme of all around.

"Upon my word they played it *con amore*."

"It is well if the jest does not become earnest one day."

Regina felt her cheeks glow; she determined again to urge her friend to leave Piermont.

And now the curtain rises upon a stately Grecian portico. In the foreground, a warrior, his short sword in his hand, has fallen upon his shield, in the attitude of a dying gladiator. An eager group of women and children, advancing through the pillars of the porch, seem arrested, horror-stricken at the sight.

It is the Spartan with his mortal wound, who brings the news of the victory, and dies on the threshold of his home.

Lady Oswestry, in her crimson tunic and white pallium is magnificent in gesture and expression. Lord Henry, looking pallid under his bronze helmet, almost draws tears from the ladies at the very thought that such a dear man is dying, even in jest.

The room resounds with acclamations; the curtain falls only to be raised again and again; but the third time it knows its own mind and wont rise any more, because the performers are gone to change their dresses and get ready for the ball.

Sir Alban was seated just behind Regina; he seemed determined to address her this evening.

"Miss Howard," he said leaning forward, "though I had the honor of grouping the performers at rehearsal, I don't know the word. Will you tell me what it is?"

"It is Lace-demon," said Regina.

"Those first two syllables misled me," he replied.

"I think it was hardly fair," she remarked; "but, in the whole word, Lace does form two syllables."

They were all rising to go.

"I hope, Miss Howard," said Alban, resting his hand on the back of her chair, and speaking in a voice that trembled at every word, "I hope you will not allow the senseless remarks of an ignorant brute to dwell upon your mind."

"Not the least in the world, I assure you," she returned, with the same smile, as she accepted Sir John's arm to go downstairs again.

The colonel thrust himself forward.

"The first polka, Miss Howard, if you are disengaged?"

"Thank you I do not dance!"

"Oh, I am sorry for that!" cried Sir John; "not even a quadrille!"

"Nothing, Sir John."

And she glided from her cavalier as soon as she could make her escape, and hastened to her own apartment; breathless, trembling, blushing, agitated; she hardly knew whether by pleasure or pain. Why? she almost laughed at herself for her folly; because Alban had spoken to her. Alban! whom she had given up—who was no more to her than Sir John Lawler, or Mr. Poole. Alban! who was waltzing at that moment, she had no doubt, with Lady Oswestry, or that bold-eyed Mrs. Falconer. It was very well to talk, she decided at last. Because she was no longer to unite her fate to his, he could not be absolutely indifferent to her; she had the charge of his fortune; she had promised Sir Herbert to redeem his error,—to bestow on Alban the inheritance of his fathers. There was a deep interest in all this; it was worth living for; she hoped she should not die yet; she hoped that foolish man had no reason for what he said.

"Flimsey," she asked, as that excellent female made her a cup of tea, "do I look very ill to-night?"

"La, mem! what we have all been saying, how well Miss Howard were looking! how beautiful! what graceful elegance!"

"I mean as to health, Flimsey."

"Dear me, mem, just the health a lady ought to have, the picture of delicate health, as Mr. Edmonds was saying."

"Very well, Flimsey. Mr. Dargle comes here every day, does he not?"

"Good gracious, mem!" (for Mr. Dargle was the doctor.)

"Don't be frightened, Flimsey," said Regina smiling, "but give me a little more sugar, please."

CHAPTER IX.



REGINA breakfasted in her own room the next morning. She knew the house was full of guests, who had stayed the night after the ball, and she was glad to be quiet and alone. Not quite alone though; for a little knock at her door was followed by the entrance of Lord Exmoor, who came to ask her how she did. She was just beginning to pour out her chocolate, and she invited him to breakfast with her. He was delighted, because he did not have chocolate in the school-room, and because he was never so happy as with Regina.

"This is your sitting-room?" he asked, looking round.

"Yes! I have never made it a dressing-room; I read and paint here, and sometimes play and sing when the others are gone out."

"And you sing like an angel," said the child, watching Regina spreading for him some marmalade on a slice of bread.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Cousin Alban said so."

"To you?"

"No, to papa."

"I have not told you how pleased I was last night."

"Which tableau did you like best?"

"I don't know; perhaps the first struck me most, because I had never seen one before."

"And yet it was your arranging."

"Did it tire you much to keep still?"

"Not much; I kept thinking you were looking at me. Cousin Alban was very kind at rehearsal, and tried to find me an easy attitude in the last scene; but I said I would not spoil the tableau on your account."

"Thank you, Exmoor! Did Edith dance last night?"

"Yes; she waltzed with cousin Henry; he is in the school-room now, writing a letter."

"Lord Henry writing a letter in the school-room?"

"Yes! he often does. He says he can't find any paper in his own room. I think he ought to tell his man to speak to the housekeeper."

Regina thought so too.

"Do you like cousin Henry?" asked the child.

"Ah! my little Exmoor, we like everybody," she returned, laughing; "only some more than others: I like *you* better, for instance, than Lord Henry."

Lord Exmoor held out his hand, and Regina accepted it across the butter-cooler with much solemnity.

"Mr. Dargle, mem," said Flimsey, inserting her head through the doorway.

"Show in Mr. Dargle, and show out my lord. I shall see you again in the school-room, Exmoor."

Mr. Dargle was a servile medical man; middle-aged, bald, ill-looking, but tolerably clever in his profession. He bowed humbly to Regina, and took a chair opposite. She was unfortunately very much under the influence of personal appearance, and Mr. Dargle made her shiver; but she was plain-spoken, and so entered into her case at once.

"They say I'm looking ill, Mr. Dargle; and I have a good deal to do."

"Doubtless! a lady in your position, with your great fortune. Are we suffering in any way?"

"I think I am easily fatigued."

"In mind as well as body?"

"Yes — in spirits."

"A little nervous, I dare say," remarked Mr. Dargle, with his fingers on her pulse.

"I don't like to be called nervous, Mr. Dargle," she said with a smile.

Mr. Dargle approached his chair still closer, and said, under his breath, "We have not anything on our mind, — have we?"

"I have a great many things on my mind, Mr. Dargle, — the most important is, how I shall refurnish the sitting-rooms at Beyminstre."

"Then," he returned, pausing, "I think we can give a little tone — a little tone to the constitution. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again in a day or two."

She went into the school-room, and found Edith in very low spirits, — hardly able to speak without tears, yet anxious to conceal her agitation. She tried not to notice it, and began talking to the children. Little Clara, who was sitting on her lap, said, "Cousin Henry is going into Scotland tomorrow with cousin Alban, to stay with uncle Shields."

"Indeed!" she said; and she could hardly help adding she was glad of it. Glad that Lord Henry was going out of the way of Edith; and glad, too, that Sir Alban was going out of *her* way. She could not deny to herself that the old wearing feeling was beginning to harass her anew; she caught herself planning how they were to meet, after the few words that had passed between them. It was the old self-questioning over again: why he had changed? Whether it was merely that he had become tired of the idea?

While she was thus occupied, she looked up, and met Edith's tearful eyes fixed upon her with an inquiring ex-

pression ; for Miss Carleton believed Lord Henry to be irresistible, and that he had only to hold out his hand for Beyminstre whenever he pleased.

"Will they be long gone?" she asked Clara.

"Only a few weeks," said the child.

"They are gone for a month," cried Lord Exmoor.

"No, till April!"

"That is a month — this is February."

"It's not! Cousin Henry told me here this morning, he was going for a few weeks."

"Four weeks is a few weeks!"

At this retort, Clara flung her spelling-book at her brother, and sprang off Regina's lap. Lord Exmoor rushed at her, and Regina caught him round the waist. Edith held Clara back, shrieking with passion. This scene was so often repeated, that Regina did not now care about it. She held Lord Exmoor fast till his passion was spent, and then gave him over to the maid, who appeared to dress the children for their walk.

"Well, Edith!" she said, as soon as the door closed upon them. "My poor child, what is the matter?"

Edith was putting away the books, and trying to hide her tears at the same time.

"Oh! it's nothing; I am a little nervous," she said. "I did not quite expect — it is rather sudden — that is all."

"Don't think me unfeeling, but I am thankful it is so for your sake — he has been here too long," urged Regina.

"He is going now; he says it is no use to speak to his father; he tells me Lord Shields would never consent; he says there is no hope, except" — Edith paused.

"There is no hope, then, dear Edith," said Regina. "Look at it boldly; you cannot creep into his family, — you cannot elope, because your husband must respect you. Lord Henry ought to have thought of all this before."

"Oh! don't blame *him*," said Edith, pressing Regina's

hand; "you don't know what he is! He said he loved me unconsciously; and then his prospects were better. He had some hopes of a good post in one of the colonies; but that is all over. And now he is going away, and there is no need for me to leave Piermont."

"But he will come back, Edith."

"Who knows? Perhaps not; and in this place everything reminds me of him. But here are the children, and I must attend to them when I hardly know where I am."

"Leave them to me, Edith; I will take them off your hands for the present. The Oswestrys are soon going out, and we shall be quiet and alone. Now, little ones, I mean to take you a long walk; Miss Carleton has a bad headache."

And Regina did take them a long walk, and told them fairy tales, and talked French with Lady Violet, who began slowly to unbend to her, and came home just in time to get ready for luncheon.

Her maid had removed her kid walking-boots, and was lacing on her black *moire*, *botlines*, when Lady Oswestry tapped at her door.

"Oh! the slender foot that we have!" cried her ladyship, as she answered Regina's invitation to come in; "do you know you would be a very dangerous person if you were aware of your own power? But, my dear, there's quite a cabal downstairs at your absence. Now, if you like me at all, you naughty child, you might do me a little favor!"

"I wish only that I could do you a great favor, Lady Oswestry."

"It is only this: there is Sir John Lawler and Mr. Poole and poor Henry and Colonel St. Aix all waiting your appearance, — all hoping for a look or a word. Now, if you would but flirt with them all together, how amusing it would be!"

"I wish I could satisfy you, Lady Oswestry; but you said truly of me that I did not know how to flirt."

"But, my dear, it is so easy—so simple! I don't think there's a woman living, unless she is very ugly, who is not born a flirt."

"I am the exception, then," said Regina.

"I believe it is the novelty that makes the men so wild about you. Colonel St. Aix is here for a few days, solely on your account; and I heard him tell my lord that he would sell his soul to the devil to marry you, if you had not a shilling in the world!"

"What a wicked wretch!"

"Awful, my love! Lord Oswestry replied. 'You have a great deal too much to do with the devil as it is, *mon cher*!' but what a handsome man! Is he not, my dear?"

"I don't know, Lady Oswestry."

"Now that is a naughty fib, wicked Regina. What splendid eyes he has,—the Irish gray eye,—something like yours!"

"Dear, I hope not," cried Regina, as they entered the dining-room, and she looked nervously round to see if Alban was there.

He was standing on the terrace, just outside the dining-room windows, with three or four of the gentlemen; he seemed to be relating something that amused them very much, for they all closed round, laughing heartily. This jarred on her feelings, and made her very uncomfortable. There was no reason in the world why he should never be merry; but, in her present mood, it seemed to remove him farther from her, and to contrast disagreeably with the impression she retained of their last meeting. Lady Oswestry beckoned them in, and they soon obeyed her summons.

"So you deserted us last night, Miss Howard," called Lord Henry across the table.

Regina smiled, but she said to herself, "If there ever was a vulgar man on the face of the earth, it is that red-faced, bawling Lord Henry."

"Miss Howard had soon had enough of you," said Lord Oswestry.

Regina smiled with more intention than before.

"But I hope you are quite well this morning?" he added.

"Quite, thank you."

"I hoped to have had the pleasure of dancing with you, Miss Howard," remarked Colonel St. Aix, in the midst of pigeon-pie.

"You are engaged to me, the first quadrille you dance anywhere," said Sir John Lawler.

"No, really Sir John."

"I asked you, as we went downstairs."

"And I declined."

"But I hoped that the pleasure was only deferred."

"Oh, you hoped, my good fellow ; we all hope !" remarked Lord Henry.

"I hope that I am to drive Miss Howard this afternoon," said Lord Oswestry.

"So do I," said Regina, graciously.

"What you two will do at Lord Shields' I cannot imagine," remarked Lady Oswestry, "now that there is neither fishing nor shooting."

Something seemed to have ruffled Lady Oswestry ; she did not linger so long as usual over the luncheon, but rose hastily, and formed the parties for riding and driving.

On Lord Henry asking her if she would ride, she answered pettishly that she had been engaged all the morning to drive with Colonel St. Aix ; and, to add insult to injury, she gave into his particular charge two sandy and honorable young ladies, who admired him and besieged him in a way to drive a more reasonable man raving mad.

Sir Alban was riding his horse, Tuny. The sandy young ladies were loud in praise of its beauty. It was just before they all mounted, when they were together in the portico,

Lord Oswestry waiting with Regina until they had started. Lord Henry exclaimed to Sir Alban, "I say, you take one of those Albinoes off my hands; my lady has given them both to me, and *J'en ai par dessus les epaules*; they ride like Johnny Gilpin!"

Sir Alban therefore mounted one of the girls, and placed himself on her right.

Lord Oswestry, catching Regina's expression, said, "I quite agree with you."

"I did not speak," she replied.

"No, but you looked; you very often need not speak. I agree with you, that Henry's remark was in the worst possible taste. You would never find Willingham say such a thing, even if there were no chance of being overheard."

"People are often very incautious," said Regina; and she told Lord Oswestry, half laughing, of the remark upon her health that she had overheard the evening before.

"So that accounts for Dargle's visit to you this morning?" he said.

"Yes, but I don't mean to earn your epitaph, notwithstanding."

"Do not," he replied. "What does Hamlet say? 'Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.' Half the young ladies in England lose their health because they fancy themselves ill. I recommend you to fall in love, Miss Howard."

"That's a strange prescription, and one that I do not think Mr. Dargle would sanction," she replied, laughing with a little constraint.

They were walking leisurely up a steep hill; he pulled up on the brow, and a lovely valley lay beyond at their feet. On the sloping ground across the vale rose the stately pile of Beyminstre, seen plainly through the leafless trees, close to the gray monastic church from which it took its name.

"There is your future home," said Lord Oswestry.

She once had thought so, but that time was past.

After a few moments spent in struggling with her tears, she said, "If you will not think me capricious, Lord Oswestry, I had rather not go there, now; I do not wish to visit Beyminstre till I am obliged — till the day I take possession."

"So we are to turn round and go home, are we?" he asked; "you won't enter the enchanted castle?"

"Thank you!" she said, in such a heartfelt tone that her companion looked earnestly at her.

"You are inscrutable, Miss Howard!" he returned; "most people till they try consider riches as the *summum bonum*!"

"I did once!" she said; "but I have sobered since that time." And, rousing herself from her dejection, she gave Lord Oswestry such a lively picture of the petty neglects of her early life, and her juvenile indignation, that she kept him laughing all the way home.

It was a trying evening for Edith. Regina would hardly confess to herself that it was rather trying also to her own feelings. She hurried to the children's table as soon as the ladies retired from the dining-room, and took Miss Carleton's hand.

"How do you feel to-night?" she whispered.

"Have the children been good?"

"Yes, pretty quiet; but I felt as if I should never get through this evening. If I can but escape being asked to sing."

"I will sing for you if it must be. Now, Exmoor, for our game at dominos."

Edith was employed in stringing beads for Lady Violet's crochet work; she dared not raise her eyes when the gentlemen came in. Her fingers trembled, and the beads fell about.

"Well, Miss Howard!" exclaimed Lord Henry, advancing to the table, "I suppose we shall all find ourselves together here again, some time next month."

"I can answer only for my own movements," said Regina. "I don't stir from this spot until we go to town."

"What! you don't accompany the Oswestrys to the Duke's?"

"No! Lord Exmoor cannot spare me," she replied smiling.

"What is going on here?" asked Sir John Lawler.

"Dominos!" said Regina, pursuing her game.

"Are you musical, Miss Howard?" inquired Colonel St. Aix.

"I should be glad if you would all go away, and leave us in peace," cried Lord Exmoor.

"You should hear Miss Howard sing a duet with Miss Carleton," observed Lord Henry, lounging in a chair beside Regina.

"Miss Howard is not going to sing," cried Lord Exmoor; "we have two more games to play."

"Do oblige us, Miss Howard," begged Lord Henry.

"I cannot, indeed," said Regina; "ask some of the other ladies; we are all busy at this table."

"Play a six, Miss Howard," suggested Lord Henry, who was looking over Lord Exmoor's dominos, which he had built up into a little wall in front of him, after the manner of children.

"Will you go, or will you not?" cried Lord Exmoor, flattening his dominos upon the table.

Edith looked up from time to time, with a restless, inquiring glance, but Lord Henry took no notice of her; he went on talking familiarly with Regina, as much as possible, to give the other gentlemen the idea that he was very much in her good graces.

"Where did you drive to day, Miss Howard?" asked Lord Henry, still reclining in his chair.

"I don't know the country; we went through several villages."

"Did the grays go well?"

"Perfectly! No, Exmoor, I cannot; I have not a two."

"I thought they seemed fresh at starting."

"Yes; but Lord Oswestry drives so well."

"Try a blank, Miss Howard."

"How dare you, cousin Henry?"

"I wish you would not provoke him, Lord Henry."

"Your wishes are my law, Miss Howard."

Edith turned paler every minute.

"You spoil these children, Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, joining the party.

"Papa, will you take them all away—Henry and the rest?" cried Exmoor.

"I will go at any moment provided Miss Howard will accompany me," remarked Lord Henry, in a tone between jest and earnest.

"I am better off where I am," laughed Regina, passing her arm round Lord Exmoor as she spoke.

The child kissed her hand, and darted such a look of defiance at his cousin, that all the gentlemen burst out laughing.

"What makes them all so merry?" asked Lady Oswestry, looking up from her game of *écarté* with Captain Falconer.

"I congratulate you, Violet," cried Lord Henry, coming up to her; "your son has just proclaimed his undying attachment to Miss Howard. It is conjectured that the happy event will take place as soon as the parties have attained their majority."

"I wish he may do no worse," returned Lady Oswestry. "But it is late; the children ought to be in bed. Miss Carleton, do you know what time it is?"

Poor Edith knew nothing but that Lord Henry had been making love (as she thought) to Regina.

She started up, conscious that she had been neglecting her business; trembling, tearful, and pallid, she cast a hurried look round; Lord Henry was standing by the fire, laughing

with Lady Oswestry about Lord Exmoor's precocious attachment. He did not seem to notice her, and she felt as if she could not part from him in that way, without a word or a look. Regina looked at her with compassion, but a little feeling of superiority glided into her mind. She felt that *she* would not stoop to beg a glance, a farewell, from one who could forget *her*. Her eye wandered over the group by the fire, where Sir Alban was talking to one of the gentlemen, and she complimented herself on the state of indifference to which she had arrived.

And she went on helping Lord Exmoor to pack up his dominos, spinning out this occupation until she saw that Edith had collected her silks, and was ready to depart. Then she rose to leave the room at the same time.

"Going to desert us already, Miss Howard?" exclaimed Lord Oswestry.

"The faculty recommend early hours, my lord," she returned with a smile.

She had not noticed that Sir Alban had moved when she did; and she started to find him at the door, which he opened for her.

"Good-night, Sir Alban," she said, bowing.

He held out his hand,—the first time since they had met at Piermont.

"Good-by, Miss Howard!" and still holding her hand, he added, "Pardon me if I wish that you would have nothing to do with 'the faculty.'"

She looked up with inquiring eyes, but the next moment her hand was free, and she was going up the great staircase with Edith and the children, hardly knowing where she was.

And Edith was blushing, radiant with delight, and clasp-
ing to her breast a little scrap of paper, which had been conveyed into her hand as she left the room. It contained these pencilled words:—"I cannot speak in this crowd. Do not, I implore you, leave Piermont before we meet again!"

CHAPTER X.



THESE six quiet weeks did wonders for Regina's health and spirits. Perhaps Mr. Dargle's attentions ought not to be overlooked as a secondary cause; for he made a point of seeing her every other day, and gave her a good deal of rose-water to drink in the shape of little pink phials.

He also managed to find out that Regina was of a serious disposition, that she was very regular in her attendance at church, and that she was well supplied with religious books. He therefore began to vary the weak draughts with strong tracts, hoping, very much through his nose, that the reading of them might be blest to her.

These slight deviations from the ordinary routine of medical treatment rather astonished Regina; but the Low Church, as it is called, had always assumed such an engaging form to her, that even a caricature like Mr. Dargle ensured her respect, though he could not command her sympathy.

It came out, in the course of conversation, that Mr. Dargle was acquainted with Mr. Reynard, and hated him in no common degree. Mr. Reynard had involved Mr. Dargle in a vexatious lawsuit, in which he had lost a great deal of time and money, and in which, even by his own account, he did not come out quite as clear as spring-water; but it was equally certain that Mr. Reynard had shown no ordinary amount of baseness; for the judge had reprimanded the lawyer severely in open court, and had said that no man's hearth could be sacred if such a system of domestic treachery were encouraged. On Regina's happening to allude to Mr. Reynard as Sir Herbert Willingham's man of business, Mr. Dargle speedily undeceived her; Sir Herbert's lawyer

was in a very ill state of health at the time the baronet desired to make his will, and Mr. Reynard was sent for, as the lawyer was gone to the south of France. He possessed himself very soon with all the details of Sir Herbert's affairs, and, passing himself off as being the regular solicitor, Mrs. Arnold naturally requested him to continue in that capacity. Regina would have been very angry if that could have done any good ; but she was in a measure pacified by the certainty that she had formed a correct estimate of his features ; and by the hope that, if such a man asserted that she could *not* transfer her right to Beyminstre, it was almost a positive assurance that she could do so.

She lived with Edith and the children ; helping to teach the two younger ones, walking with them, taking them by turns with her when she drove out.

She grew more and more attached to the pretty little governess. It was pleasant to feel herself looked up to, and Edith's jealousy seemed quite to have subsided, now that the too interesting Lord Henry was out of sight. He would have been out of mind too, as far as Regina was concerned, had she not now and then suspected that certain letters that came two or three times during this interval, and that caused Edith to be in a tumult of joy and confusion, were specimens of his epistolary talent.

Mr. Best still came twice a week to Lord Exmoor ; a little neat man who never raised his eyes. Edith was so thankful that Regina was present to help her to receive Mr. Best, that she who had hardly dared raise *her* eyes before, when doing the honors of her school-room, now looked him boldly in his face ; and even ventured to bid him come nearer the fire, and condoled with him on his wet ride from the parsonage. Mr. Best, too, to speak figuratively, basked in the sunshine of Regina's presence. Lord Exmoor had suddenly become well mannered. He placed his tutor a chair, brought down his own books, abstained from spinning teeto-

tums on the latin verbs, and ate no more burnt almonds while saying the multiplication table.

"Papa and mamma come back to-morrow, Exmoor," cried Regina, who was playing at ball with him, together with Edith and Lady Clara, on the wide landing-place at the top of the double staircase. Lady Violet was walking up and down the long gallery which led from it, with a gray silk mantle and a parasol, giving herself all the airs of a lady at a botanical fête; preferring that mode of taking exercise on a wet day to playing at ball like a child.

"I am glad papa is coming back," cried Lord Exmoor. "Clara and I go every day to his dressing-room."

"And he gives us all sorts of things," said Clara, throwing the ball with a mighty effort over her own head.

"Stupid!" exclaimed Lord Exmoor.

"Remember our agreement," said Regina; "the first quarrel, Edith and I vanish."

"Papa gave me a book the day before he went," exclaimed Clara.

"A French book, which she can't read," retorted her brother.

"I can!"

"What's the name of it, then?"

"Beauty and the Beast."

"Oh, that's French, — is it, madam?"

"Regina, may not I quarrel?" shouted Clara.

"Try if you can catch this ball instead. Now," cried Regina, tossing it to Clara as she spoke.

But the child missed it, and it rolled down the broad stairs.

At the same moment a gentleman coming up from the hall, caught the ball and threw it back among the players.

"Papa," cried the children, running forward to meet Lord Oswestry.

He had come home, he told Regina, a few hours before

Lady Oswestry, to meet Lord Henry and Sir Alban, who were expected at Piermont in the course of the day.

"I'm so sorry Henry is coming," cried Exmoor, with the frankness peculiar to children. "I hate him!—a great beast!"

"Oh, my dear!" remonstrated Miss Carleton.

Lord Exmoor glanced at Regina, and, seeing that her countenance expressed rather acquiescence than anything else, he did not repent, but threw the ball to his father.

"I wouldn't be jealous," said Lord Oswestry, laughing; "*you* have no reason to complain, I think."

"We were all so very happy," said the child.

"Exmoor, don't talk; mind your game," cried little Clara, imperiously.

"You look as if you had done with Mr. Dargle, Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, when they were tired of playing, and they were all walking down the gallery toward the school-room.

"He is not quite done with *me*," she returned; "but I think his efforts are principally addressed to my mind."

Regina stopped at her own door. She did not make a toilet for these early hours; but she thought Flimsey might as well smooth her hair, which was somewhat ruffled by her exertions.

While her maid combed and plaited her long tresses, she opened a small oaken case that stood on her table, threw back the folding-leaves, and contemplated an exquisite miniature, which reposed on a black velvet ground, at the bottom of the cabinet. She had placed her own innumerable sketches of Mrs. Willingham in the hands of our first miniature painter, and this delightful portrait was the result.

While she sat absorbed by the past, quite unconscious of the progress Flimsey was making with her *coiffure*, that good old soul was dealing about her black pins with an air of mystery that she asked no better than to explain.

"Is it done, Flimsey?" inquired Regina, without even looking in the glass.

"Yes, mem; I have brought the scroll a little forward, mem; if you should approve of the alteration!"

"It does very nicely, I think, — no, I shall not wear any bracelets to-night."

"My lord and Sir Alban has arrived," said Flimsey.

"I am not going down to-night, and therefore they will not influence my dress, — stay, I want a handkerchief."

"Ah!" sighed Flimsey, presenting the perfumed sachet to her mistress.

"What is the matter, Flimsey?"

"Lord Henry has arrived; and I am not the only one in the house, or out of it, too, who thinks he had better have gone away, and kept away forever and ever!" cried Flimsey, becoming very energetic. "There are some people in this house too young for their business, and some too pretty for their business, and some which had better go home to their friends before worse comes of it, — as Mr. Edmonds says, and as I think mem, if you don't think it too great a liberty my taking to be thinking at all."

This grammatical address made Regina think, at any rate. She could not be blind to the fact, that the very great number of people who, according to Flimsey and Mr. Edmonds, were misplaced at Piermont, resolved themselves into poor little Edith Carleton.

"What is it, Flimsey?" she asked. "If you speak plain I may be able to do some good, but I can make nothing of all this."

"We all can see, mem, and Mr. Edmonds have eyes which could see through a brick wall; which he lived with my Lord Pentland before he came to my lord, and saw Lord Henry at his eldest brother's, and says the whole family is tarred with the same stick, — if you'll excuse the proverb, mem, — and stick at nothing they take a fancy to; and his

lordship is always following Miss Carleton about, when no one is by but the children; and the gentlemen downstairs do say a great deal about it, mem."

"Very well, Flimsey," said Regina, preparing to leave the room; "only I conclude you know that Miss Carleton is a lady by birth and education, and that Lord Henry might be supposed to pay his addresses to her, as well as to any person in this house."

You can't make a lady's maid understand that a governess is any better than herself; the wages settle the question.

"Reely, mem!" said Flimsey, with perfect incredulity.

Regina went to the study with the intention of again remonstrating with Edith on the subject of Lord Henry; but she had hardly sat down before that troublesome person himself came in, and very much surprised he looked to find Regina among the children.

"Miss Howard," he said, coming up familiarly to shake hands, "how well you are looking! I am afraid you have not spent your time in regretting our absence."

"Not the least in the world, I can assure you," she said, laughing.

"I should think not," grumbled Lord Exmoor; "and what brings you here, cousin Henry?"

Lord Henry produced a penholder.

"I find myself in a difficulty, and I thought that, — how are you, Miss Carleton? I hope you are quite well, — I thought Miss Carleton would be kind enough to give me a pen. I can find none in my room."

Edith rose hurriedly, and began looking in her writing-table.

"I should think Henry was turning author, from his constant want of writing materials," said Lady Violet, superciliously.

"I don't believe he wants a pen," whispered Lord Exmoor to Regina.

Lord Henry was helping Edith in her search, fitting the pens one by one into the holder.

"You received my last letter from V—— castle?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I must think" —

"Have I not given you time to think?"

"No, then," and Edith left the desk, and sat down by the window in great agitation.

Lord Henry stood arranging his pen for a few seconds, and then said gayly,—

"When my poem comes out, Miss Howard, will you engage to read it?"

"Not I, indeed," said Regina.

"Pray, do you mean to honor us by appearing in the drawing-room this evening?"

"Certainly not."

"You wish to drive me to despair," he replied, laughing as he left the room.

"It is over, Regina," murmured Edith. "I ask but one thing, — that you will never mention his name again."

Regina pressed her hand. "I promise you not to speak of *him*," she said; "but you will let me talk a little about yourself. Should you find it painful to remain here, don't forget that you will always be welcome at Holmwood."

Had Edith been wise she would have sent in her resignation the next day, and been off to Holmwood in a week; but she hesitated. She could not help thinking, even then, that Regina must be partial to Lord Henry; that perhaps mixed with her kindness was a little anxiety to get rid of a dangerous rival. She thanked her friend, and said she would reflect; she had no plea to urge to Lady Oswestry at

present; but if any excuse should suggest itself, then, perhaps, she would leave Piermont.

The house was now full of company. Regina held herself aloof as much as possible from everybody; there was nothing congenial to her nature in people of that class. Perhaps, to a poetical and sensitive girl, whose ideas of duty were very keen, it was not altogether pleasant to receive the most devoted attention from a number of men who she knew would never have taken the trouble to pick up her glove had she not owned a hundred pounds in the world. She disliked the women, with their smooth unmeaning phrases, their ostentatious goodness, their committees and charity fairs. She disliked their bitterness to each other, their coarse flattery of the men; their putting their persons up to sale, — not like the quadroons at New Orleans, shrinking and broken-hearted, but gladly and boastfully, and full of indecent joy and triumph when they found a buyer.

"I did something for you while we were away," said Lady Oswestry, in the evening, when Regina took refuge beside her; "as you would not come with us to V—— Castle, I asked Lord Ellesdon (the duke's eldest son, my dear) to come here. Just before the season, you know — don't you feel grateful?"

"I have no words to express my thanks, Lady Oswestry."

"It is no laughing matter," urged her ladyship; "you can do no better than that. I thought I was acting very unkindly by Henry; but I felt it my duty to give you a chance."

Regina only laughed. But she saw that whenever she spoke or was spoken to, Sir Alban kept his eyes fixed upon her. It made her quite irritable. A party of young people can hardly assemble together without talking some nonsense, and a very good thing it is; for what young people mean for sense is generally too foolish to be borne, — their nonsense is more passable. However, they began exchanging their ideas

on the subject of love, which was very refreshing,—the more so as scarcely any one present knew anything about the “genuine article.”

“Do you believe any one can love twice?” asked Lord Henry, sitting down by Lady Charlotte.

“Ah, no,” replied Lady Charlotte, stroking down the gathers of her little nightgown.

“What do you say, Miss Howard?” asked Lord Oswestry.

“A dozen times!” she retorted; “each one better than the last. Practice is so improving.”

“I quite agree with Miss Howard,” said Lord Oswestry, “or else how shall we account for the endless marriages that take place every season? I suppose, Lady Charlotte, that even you will hardly assert that all the brides of all ages who are led up the steps of St. George’s Church bestow their hands on the first object of their choice?”

“Ah, no,” said Lady Charlotte, flattening the seam with the top of her thimble, and casting up her eyes; “but how many unhappy victims marry from pique,—to conceal a broken heart from the world!”

“Yes,” echoed Lady Adeline, threading her needle; “*we* have no cloisters.”

“’Fore heaven, this is a more excellent song than the other,” exclaimed Lord Henry. “‘A new way of taking the veil,’—I think that shall be the title of my comedy, Miss Howard; my play, you know, that you won’t promise to read.”

“I *will* promise to read it, if that is to be the subject,” she replied, laughing; “yours will be a ‘Comedy of Errors’—of all errors the greatest. I suppose the object in a marriage of pique is to mortify the inconstant suitor, instead of which he would be excessively flattered. Now, though a woman might bring herself not to wish him any harm, it is going too far to sacrifice herself in order to afford him a pleasure.”

Sir Alban looked at Regina, as if to make her address him ; but she had no such intention.

"That's right, Miss Howard," said Sir John Lawler ; "that's what I say — let's have no pique, but marry a fellow whom you like, and who likes you ; and then, whatever turns up, — why, you have had a fair start."

"I quite agree with you, Sir John," she replied.

This acquiescence delighted him so much that, thinking to contribute very greatly to her amusement, the worthy baronet exclaimed, "Will you have a game at dominos ? Now, come, don't say no."

"Thank you, Sir John," said Regina, trying not to laugh ; "but I am not very fond of dominos : I make them an excuse for flirting with Lord Exmoor, that is all."

"Well, Miss Howard," said Sir John, "so long as it is only my Lord Exmoor, who is, I suppose, about eight years old" — here his eye sought Lady Oswestry.

"Oh ! don't ask *me*, Sir John," replied Lady Oswestry ; "I can't remember all their ages ; he may be eight by this time. Time flies so !" sighed her ladyship, fixing her brilliant eyes on the chimney clock.

"Well ! so long as it is only little Exmoor," resumed the baronet, "why, I don't care."

"You see," exclaimed Lady Oswestry, "you have Sir John's permission to play at dominos with Exmoor !"

"And to play, I hope, at piquet with me," said Lord Oswestry.

"Oh, yes !" cried Regina, rising quickly ; "then one need not talk to anybody."

"What do you play for, Oswestry ?" asked Captain Falconer, coming to look over the players.

"We are not so mercenary as to play for anything," answered Regina, taking up the cards to deal.

"Oh, when people don't play for money, they are said to play for love," remarked the captain with his sneer.

Sir Alban overheard the captain's witticism, and "looked ugly at him," to quote John Bunyan's expression. He kept Regina in sight as long as he could; but as soon as she had finished her game she stole off to her room, according to her usual custom.

CHAPTER XI.



IT happened, perhaps not unreasonably, about this time, that Edith fell ill. Mr. Dargle said she had the influenza, and that name did as well as another for that heart-sickness to which young ladies are unfortunately liable. It had the good effect of delivering her from the children, too; for Lady Oswestry disliked an epidemic in the house, and of all epidemics, her ladyship told Regina, influenza was the most catching.

"You have only to look at a person, my dear, even if they are half a mile off, to find yourself sneezing directly," she informed Regina. And Miss Howard was therefore carefully excluded from Edith's room. Even Lord Oswestry particularly requested that Miss Howard would oblige him by running no risks.

Lord Henry was still louder in his entreaties. "Good Heaven! he hoped she would not think of going near the governess,—a nice little creature, to whom he knew Miss Howard had been very kind. But really compassion should have its limits."

It was not exactly to oblige Lord Henry that Regina kept away; but she felt that, in common courtesy to her host and hostess, she must not run the risk of spreading the dreaded complaint all over the house. She contented herself with

writing a few lines to Edith every morning and evening, just to show her that somebody in the world thought of her, and was willing to amuse her.

The children were placed under the charge of Mademoiselle Laurette, the young ladies'-maid; and, as her control was merely nominal, Regina had them with her nearly as much as she pleased. Lady Oswestry had a charming little morning room which opened into the conservatory, and among the very few simple and natural tastes which she retained was that of tending some few choice flowers which were ranged near the door of her boudoir.

One morning Regina was in this room with the children, reading them a story, while their mamma was amusing herself in the conservatory beyond. She had a remarkably soft voice, and it gave Lord Oswestry the most intense pleasure to listen if he could by some rare chance induce her to read aloud. He happened to come in to ask some question of his lady, and remained lounging on the sofa, very willing to postpone his curiosity till she came back again. It was not a room that any one would be in a hurry to leave: it was small and light, and fitted up with that pretty kind of chintz that looks like Chiné silk; a few bright pictures of the modern school, two or three Parian statuettes, some bronze and silver objects of *virtù* were tastefully arranged about the walls and shelves. And while you reclined upon a chair, soft and elastic as a floating cloud, the perfume of roses and violets was wafted around, while your eye was attracted by long vistas of camellias and other gorgeous blossoms, ranged in a deep bank along the hot-house walls.

Lady Oswestry was moving gracefully about; now raising her handsome hand to gather a flower above her head, — now turning to disengage her dress from the angle of a stand, — now beckoning to Sir Alban to come and help her in her morning task.

It was the little fairy tale, *La Belle et La Bête*, which

belonged to Lady Clara; and Regina was reading it to the children in French, much to the delight of Lady Violet, who used to do her utmost to imitate Miss Howard's rapid pronunciation.

But sometimes Miss Howard came to a pause altogether, for she caught little bits of Lady Oswestry's dialogue with Sir Alban, and she wanted to hear the rest. She was saying something about Beyminstre, — such a very odd subject to entertain *him* with, — and he was gathering here and there, under her directions, a moss-rose or a cluster of azalias.

"Her improvements have been in very good taste, with one exception, that looks rather bad, I think (Oh, that striped camellia! a little lower down, more out of sight); and that is, she would insist, against my lord's advice, on moving the conservatory away from the house, farther off, quite on the other side of the cedars. I don't know if you are acquainted with the situation?"

"Perfectly."

Regina, who was reading how the merchant gathered the fatal bunch of roses, now came to a full stop.

"O Regina! quick! go on!" cried the children, eager to hear what came next.

She went on reading; but soon her attention wandered again to the conservatory.

"Certainly men are the strangest creatures! do you like jonquils? I may gather one, I think. They blow well this year, don't they? Except Sir John Lawler, whom I quite revere, you have none of you the heart of a mouse. I wouldn't let a beautiful young" —

Sir Alban laughed, and, as they were walking down the conservatory, their voices died away.

So did Regina's; just, too, as the merchant had brought his daughter to the mysterious palace, and they were sitting down to supper together.

"What next? Oh pray, go on!" cried the children.

"You tire Miss Howard; take yourselves off with your book," said Lord Oswestry.

"No, no," said Regina. "I am not tired; but the scent of the flowers makes me feel idle, I believe. Now, Exmoor, what do you think is coming?"

Lord Exmoor, pale with excitement, leaned on her knees and fastened his eyes on her face.

"I don't know whether it is your reading, Miss Howard, but *I* feel quite impatient for the *dénouement*," remarked Lord Oswestry. "Eh! what is it, Alban?"

Sir Alban, who had just entered through the glass doors, stopped short, and looked coldly from one to the other; for Lord Oswestry was in a corner that was not visible from without, and he had fancied Regina was there alone with the children.

"Lady Oswestry sent me here for her garden-basket," he said, after a moment's pause.

Regina left her seat, and quietly handed it to Sir Alban.

There was a dignity, a want of pique, about her manner toward him, that he was likely to feel very keenly. He lingered, and tried to catch her eye; but she went back to her low seat among the children, and took up her book.

"There, you naughty Exmoor! You have lost my place," she cried.

"I'll find it," exclaimed Lady Clara, turning the leaves.

"I'll find it before any of you," said Lord Oswestry, reaching down for the book and presenting it graciously to Regina.

Sir Alban was obliged to retreat, and as he left the room he heard Lord Oswestry exclaim with a laugh, "I dare say he would have liked to stay; we all look so very comfortable."

The story was just finished when Lady Oswestry, with Sir Alban carrying her basket, appeared at the open doors. She held up her garden scissors in sign of attention, and

waited till Regina had read the last page, before she entered.

"Does she not read beautifully?" she asked, turning her graceful head over her shoulder to address her question to Sir Alban.

"Beautifully!" replied Lord Oswestry with emphasis.

"I am saving my best bouquets for the ball I mean to give before we go to town," said Lady Oswestry, coming close to Regina, and dropping one by one some beautiful flowers in her lap; "but I can afford you a few to-day, notwithstanding."

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" cried Regina, seizing and arranging the blossoms as they fell. "No more, Lady Oswestry; I have more than my share already."

"You shall have one of my yellow azalias," said her ladyship; "they are so sweet!" And she stooped over the basket that Sir Alban still held, turning the flowers with her long white fingers till she found what she sought. "'Sweets to the sweet,'" she said archly, touching Regina's face with the azalia, and then smiling at Sir Alban.

The bend of the head with which he received this sentiment was too much for Regina. She carried off her irritation by a quotation from the same play.

"'Beggar that I am! I am poor even in thanks; but I thank you,'" she said, courtesying to Lady Oswestry, and holding out her disengaged hand to Lord Exmoor, who seized it eagerly.

"Where are you two going?" asked Lady Oswestry, who had already begun to refresh one of her jars, with the assistance of Sir Alban.

"We are going to follow your good example," said Regina, pointing to the jar behind which Sir Alban was standing; "don't grudge me *my* cavalier, Lady Oswestry."

A glance, the first she had addressed to Sir Alban, seemed

to point this remark, and to associate him with his splendid hostess. At least so he thought, for he started.

"Oh, you know it is a settled thing between you two," said Lady Oswestry, laughing, and giving something between a push and a caress to her son as he passed her.

"And you will show me the picture of your lovely lady?" asked Lord Exmoor, as they were leaving the room.

"Yes, yes," said Regina.

"What lovely lady?" asked Lord Oswestry.

"Marie Antoinette," she replied.

"No, I don't mean her," persisted the child; "I mean the lovely face with dark hair; you never told me the name."

Regina ran out of the room. Sir Alban let the basket fall. Lady Oswestry said, laughing, "Well, about a lady there can hardly be a mystery."

Lord Exmoor hastened after Regina and caught her dress. "I am very sorry. What did I say? have I done any harm?" he asked.

"No, my poor child," said Regina, stooping to embrace him; "only, that lady is dead, and I loved her; and therefore I don't speak of her to people who did not know her, too."

Lord Exmoor, burst into tears; and while he was sobbing on her shoulder, and she doing her best to soothe him, Sir Alban begged her pardon and passed her on his way upstairs; and she had the conviction that he had been just behind, and had heard the little explanation that took place.

"Let him!" she said to herself; "he cares for no one; he has never addressed me a word even about his own mother. It is clear that I did not know him, and he does not know *me* yet."

If he did not, he seemed anxious to improve his knowledge; for, whenever she appeared, he did not for a single moment cease to watch her. He listened to her words, he studied her countenance, he moved into the music-room when

she went to the piano, he crossed the drawing-room if she took a chair out of his sight.

One evening she did think she had got rid of him. Lord Henry, who seemed rather more intimate with him than other people, had taken him off to the library just as Lord Oswestry took her into the music-room. Sir John Lawler followed her to the piano, and, seeing a volume of Schubert's *Melodies* on the desk, asked her to sing *Horch, horch, die Lerch*, which she did exquisitely. Directly Sir Alban heard her voice, he came back and took a seat in the drawing-room, close to the open folding-doors, but out of her sight. Lord Oswestry was not contented with one song,—he asked for another and another, till at last, as there were some other young ladies to exhibit, Regina left the piano, book in hand, and sat down beside him inside the folding-doors, close to Sir Alban, without seeing him.

She was turning over the leaves of the last song, and Lord Oswestry was looking over her.

"I cannot think why you like that screaming thing, *Die nonne*," she said.

"If you must have the truth, it is because you sing it with so much pathos," he replied.

"Do I? well, I pity nuns extremely."

"And yet, if you were a Catholic, I should be half afraid you would end that way."

"I assure you I have not the least vocation for the cloister; I think it a horrible imprisonment."

"And yet, you see, it is a common refuge for people who have undergone great sorrows."

Regina looked up at Lord Oswestry, wondering to what he could allude.

"You will not deny that you have suffered," he said; "the very tone of your voice betrays it; you are not one who can take coolly the ordinary bereavements and sorrows of life,—that is all."

"The only sorrow a woman could escape by going into a convent," said Regina, archly, "would be, a bad husband! All other sorrows she would carry with her; now, that is a grief I don't suffer from yet."

"It is a grief you are very careful to avoid, I think," said Lord Oswestry; "but we shall see what you have to say to Lord Ellesdon."

"I am all impatience. But, seriously, I will tell you what I think will suit me better than a cloister. When I come of age, I shall have all the summer before me. I shall take a cottage at the Lakes with a real widow, if I must have a *chaperon*, and I shall make excursions all over that district. Then I shall go back to Holmwood, and live there till I have arranged some plan by which I can travel to all the countries I wish to see. I shall consult you, if you will still permit me."

"I shall always be delighted to be of service to you; but all this time you forget Beyminstre."

"Oh, I shall never live at Beyminstre" —

She stopped, for Sir Alban was close to her, looking at her with astonishment.

The same half smile that he could not interpret stole over her face. She held out her music-book and said calmly, — "Perhaps you will have the kindness to lay this down on the piano," and so put an end to the momentary embarrassment on both sides.

A day or two after, she was crossing the inner court before dinner. It was the shortest way from Regina's staircase to the drawing-room, and, in mild weather, she always took that path.

The orange-trees had just been out for the summer, and one or two had already begun to blossom. She stopped an instant to enjoy the delightful perfume.

At the same moment Lord Oswestry came out of the door at the foot of the opposite staircase, and met her.

"Do you like them?" he asked, and gathered her a cluster that had just opened.

"Thank you. Are they not delicious?"

"I do not think so. The perfume reminds me of the flavor which I detest, and which Chiffon puts into all the sweet things."

"After all, I must not wear these," said Regina; "they are only for weddings. Will you take them back?"

"Why they are still less appropriate to me; for 'the happiest day of my life' came off a good many years ago."

Regina gave him back the orange spray.

"But you must not return it, — that's too bad!" he said.

"Oh, dear, but Lady Oswestry will make such a jest of it." And she put the blossoms into the pocket of her dress.

He stood laughing at her. At this moment Sir Alban came through the court.

"We are taking up the path," she said, stepping close to the tree.

Sir Alban bowed in passing. Lord Oswestry offered Regina his arm, and they went together into the drawing-room.

Sir Alban looked hard at her as she entered; but she walked past him without the slightest glance, and took her usual seat by Lady Oswestry.

"Look here! what my lord has given me," she said, drawing the broken spray a little out of her pocket.

"I declare I shall be jealous!" exclaimed Lady Oswestry, who, with a woman's quickness, knew perfectly that Regina would never give her cause.

"What an odd creature it is!" she said, turning to Lord Henry; "look how she has crumpled up her flowers, and put them in her pocket."

Lord Henry replied by a commonplace almost too silly to record, — that the man would be very happy for whom she would wear the orange blossoms.

And Sir John Lawler found a moment before dinner to exhort her thus:—

“I tell you what, Miss Howard,—here’s a talk about nose-gays and orange flowers. I’m not a man to be frightened at a young lady’s ‘No!’ No means ‘Yes’ nine times out of ten. If you are agreeable, so am I. Come, now.”

“We are both very agreeable, Sir John, but I wish to lead a single life.”

She rode out now with the others. She had not forgotten her early lessons on the Shetland pony. Her figure, and her seat, and her riding-dress, were all much admired, but she was used to compliments—she set them down, more than was true, to her fortune, and believed nothing that was said to her.

“Do I sit right? Do I hold the reins properly?” she asked Lord Oswestry; and, when he told her plainly she did, she was satisfied.

They were a large party, riding in the park, and they halted after a long gallop on a rising ground commanding the stream.

“You must build a bridge across your river at Beyminstre, Miss Howard,” said Lord Oswestry; “there’s no bridge anywhere; it must be very inconvenient.”

“The river looks so wild and natural, I think it would be almost a pity,” answered Regina.

“Oh, I vote for a bridge!” cried Sir John Lawler.

“And there’s so much excitement in building,” remarked Mrs. Falconer.

“What do you think, Sir Alban?” asked Regina, pointedly addressing him, as he sat proud and cold on his horse close to her.

“You must excuse me, Miss Howard, I am no judge of the picturesque,” he said, and he reined back out of speaking distance.

Regina smiled a little. “He will not understand,” she

thought; "he does not choose to imagine that what little I do to Beyminstre I wish should be in accordance with his taste, that he may not have anything to undo when he receives it. Blind, but no matter; he has lost the power to wound me now!"

CHAPTER XII.



HE prospect of the ball was now the prevailing topic, not only at Piermont, but all over the country.

To some, it was the very climax of their hopes to obtain an invitation at all; to others, the mere invitation was almost worthless unless it was accompanied by the offer of remaining at Piermont till the next day. The Chillingworths, who were asked, were in this latter predicament. Lady Oswestry had filled her house with people she liked better, and Mrs. Chillingworth had the vexation of allowing to her intimate friends, that though her family had cards for the ball, yet they were not invited to pass the night at Piermont.

Miss Carleton was now recovered from her illness, and the children were again assigned to her charge. She seemed to Regina to be singularly anxious and restless in her countenance and manner; she was depressed too; but that, if she had really had the influenza, was not at all surprising.

Much to Lady Oswestry's vexation, Lord Ellesdon only made his appearance the day before the ball, and he was to leave Piermont the day after. This was hardly giving him or Regina a fair trial; for her ladyship, never very serious on any subject, was rather tired of advancing the views of

her cousin Henry, and she thought it would be an amusing variety to tempt the heiress with another bait.

"We are all in despair, Miss Howard, I assure you!" exclaimed Lord Henry, as Regina entered the drawing-room before dinner.

"Why, what is the matter?" she asked, going quietly to her accustomed seat in the corner of the sofa.

"Lord Ellesdon is arrived, my dear, that is all," returned Lady Oswestry, lifting her spaniel out of Regina's way. "He is safe in the yellow room overhead, and he is so very dazzling that these gentlemen think you will never look at them again."

Regina seldom knew whether her hostess spoke in jest or earnest; she leaned back in her corner, and took up a Chinese screen.

"I say, Miss Howard," exclaimed Lord Henry, crossing over to her, "I cannot think what became of a pair of compasses I left on the library table this morning, and I accused you in my heart of having carried them away."

"I did not steal your compasses, Lord Henry," began Regina, interrupting herself to bow to Lord Ellesdon, who had just entered, and was presented to her at the moment; "but I have some idea who is the guilty person."

"Permit me, Miss Howard," interposed Lord Henry, very vain of showing Lord Ellesdon that he was on the best terms with the heiress, "you could never be said to *steal* anything I possess, for it would become yours from the moment you took a fancy to it."

"But allow me to represent that I had no fancy whatever for your compasses; I saw them to-day in the school-room (Lord Henry colored a little), and I took for granted that Clara had picked them up in some of her wanderings. It is her way. She has at this moment a jet bracelet of mine, a gold thimble, and two pairs of Swedish gloves."

"Oh, Clara is the *Gazza Ladra*, is she?" said Lord

Henry. Lord Ellesdon, who had been seized upon by a countess and her daughter as soon as he entered the room, now turned round, as he stood on the hearth-rug, and surveyed Regina from head to foot, very properly desirous of ascertaining whether she was worth his future attentions or not.

At the same time Regina had an equal opportunity of examining Lord Ellesdon, and making up her mind whether she should like to buy him.

He had a heavy countenance, — such as was common in the reign of Henry the Eighth, — with a low forehead, and a great deal of face below the mouth. He looked proud, and dull, and honest; was perfectly without affectation, and, considering the position he held in society, had not an exaggerated notion of his own importance.

He was not struck dumb with astonishment at Regina's beauty; he had seen too much in every style for that; but he thought he had never met with a face whose expression pleased him more, nor a figure more gracefully proportioned.

Her voice seemed to him her greatest charm, its tone was so sweet, and its accent so fresh and varied. He was just thinking of something to say to her when dinner was announced, and Sir John Lawler carried her, quite out of his reach, to her old place beside Lord Oswestry. And in the evening there was Colonel St. Aix making fierce love to her, and Lord Henry going on pretty much as if he was engaged, and Sir John pursuing her; so that Lord Ellesdon, who rather required to be sought, did not speak a word to her, but resumed his after-dinner conversation with Sir Alban. He wished to go up the Nile, and was anxious to learn something about Egypt.

"Do you know what those two are talking about?" asked Lord Oswestry, coming up to Regina's chair for a minute.

Regina had heard every syllable, but she didn't choose to say so.

"Ellesdon wishes to go up the Nile."

"Very well! It is a very natural wish; so do I!"

"Then, Miss Howard, here's a chance for you."

"I suppose I ought not to understand; but I do; and I think you are very absurd."

"I assure you I don't know a better way of your visiting the country."

"Then I shall stay at home."

Perhaps Mrs. Flimsey had never in her life been in such a tremor of excitement as the evening when she was dressing Regina for the ball.

"The *tabliaux*," she informed her young lady, "was nothing to this. Oh, my lady's dress was so lovely! Mrs. Cleaver had taken her in to see it while the ladies were at dinner. White gauze, with broad gold stripes, and gold ornaments, everything gold! And Mrs. Falconer was in pink satin; and the Misses Chillingworth had blue tarlatan dresses, with no style at all in them." And poor Regina had to hear the dress of every lady staying in the house; for Flimsey had made the round of the dressing rooms under the wing of Mrs. Cleaver, and she was unwilling that so much experience should be lost. And when the toilet was complete, and her young lady stood before her in her spotless white crape and wreath of white camellias with their stiff shining leaves, Mrs. Flimsey was ready to take her affidavit that Miss Howard would be the beauty of the room, and, what was more, that my Lord Ellesdon would think so.

What Lord Ellesdon thought did not come to light. He had asked Miss Howard for the first quadrille that morning, and she had replied she was engaged. And she made the same answer to all the other gentlemen who invited her. Lord Oswestry came up to her as she stood by the side of his lady in the ball-room.

"You dance, I suppose," he said, — "you, who do everything well?"

"Yes, I am very fond of it, — I am engaged to dance with Lord Exmoor."

"On my word, he takes care of himself betimes! Who will you have next?"

Regina looked half shyly up to him, as if she said, —

"You have not asked me!"

"I thought you would prefer a younger man," he replied, laughing. "Will you do me the honor to waltz with me?"

"With pleasure," she said, looking very happy.

Lord Henry came up after the quadrille, while she was standing talking with Lord Exmoor, and invited her to waltz.

"I'm sorry I am engaged," she said, graciously.

"*Après?*" he said, looking insinuating.

"I do not dance more than twice, my lord."

"I am very unfortunate to-night," he said carelessly; and he went off to Lady Oswestry.

"I think," said her ladyship, "another time, Henry, when you wish to dance with an heiress, you might as well take the trouble to secure her before the ball begins."

Sir Alban, who was not dancing, seemed to find sufficient occupation in watching Regina and Lord Oswestry. Nothing could be finer than their dancing — the perfect grace and perfect decorum of both. He held his *valscuse* as a good Frenchman does, — so slightly, that it seemed her own act that made them float round so securely together. It was all smooth and quiet, and strictly in time. She looked so happy, too; her dark gray eyes kindled, her cheek colored, her polished hair glancing like a mirror as she whirled rapidly round.

Sir Alban's countenance did not seem to reflect the gayety that was pictured in hers. He looked graver and more gloomy every minute.

When they fell out of the circle, they were close to Sir Alban.

"Don't you dance, Alban?" said Lord Oswestry.

"No, never."

Colonel St. Aix came up at the moment, and invited Regina for the polka.

She declined. Sir Alban looked blacker than before.

"If you would but grant me a quadrille," urged the colonel; but really it is too bad to let Lord Oswestry engross you in this way."

"We have not finished our waltz," said Regina smiling.

"That's what I complain of," said the colonel; "if my lord would let me take his place for the other half, I should say that was a fair arrangement."

"Do you think I would pay Miss Howard so bad a compliment?" returned Lord Oswestry, laughing.

"And you know how soon I am tired," she said, looking up to Lord Oswestry. "I limit myself to two dances; because, otherwise, I should dance all night, and repent it all the next day."

"I am afraid you are not very strong," said Lord Oswestry; "but just a few more turns."

And they glided off into the circle again.

When the waltz was over, they went to the refreshment-room, and, while Regina was eating an ice, Lord Ellesdon came in with his partner, and addressed Miss Howard, not to ask her to dance, but to have a little conversation.

"You are going to town immediately, I believe?" said Lord Ellesdon.

"Yes; the day after to-morrow."

"You mean to patronize the Opera?"

"I hope we shall. It will depend on Lady Oswestry how often we go."

"You sing, I understand, Miss Howard?"

"Yes, in the country."

"You admire Mendelssohn, I conclude?"

"Not so much as the earlier German composers."

"They are famous for shooting in this country, I think; do you belong to the archery club?"

"No, I am no archer; I have not even a bow."

"I trust," said Lord Ellesdon, "that I shall often have the pleasure of meeting you in town." And with this gracious wish, to which Regina responded with a gracious bow, he left the refreshment-room with the lady, who had just finished her lemonade.

"The pleasure will be all on one side," said Regina, as Lord Oswestry led her back to the ball-room.

"I cannot think what makes you so cruel!" he replied.

They were standing arm-in-arm at the side of the room, watching a spirited galope, Sir Alban standing near, and following them with his eyes.

"Why, do you consider Lord Ellesdon's conversation amusing?" she asked, looking puzzled.

"No; but as good as you generally get."

"What! I am to hear that, at every ball in London?"

"Yes, thereabouts."

"Why, I thought London conversation was so famous," she urged.

"Ay, that is dinner-talk at some few houses; not that I like it; I think it is very fatiguing. I had rather eat my dinner in peace."

"What a material confession!"

"And you will not dance any more?"

"No, I am plotting how to make my escape."

"When we go to supper take a wrong turning, and vanish down the corridor. Keep early hours while you can."

"Then I must go by myself," said Regina, looking with some dismay at the closely crowded doorways.

"I am just going to waltz; but here is Willingham doing nothing; he will give you his arm to the foot of the stone staircase, and then you know your way."

She would have given the world to stop him; her cheeks burned, but what could she say? She saw Lord Oswestry

take Sir Alban by the arm and whisper to him ; she saw Alban's head inclined as if in assent.

"I have settled it with Alban," said Lord Oswestry, coming back to her ; "you will keep in the corridor, for I wont have you cross the court in the night air."

"Oh, thank you ! they go up the double staircase, do they not ? I feel your kindness so much, for I am tired already."

"Was that my fault ? Did I make you waltz too much ?"

"Oh, no ! it has been my great pleasure of the evening dancing with you. I am so afraid with other people, that they would not keep time, or that they would tear my dress."

"It was so kind in you to dance with Exmoor ; and yet I was half provoked, for there were twenty people making interest with me to ask you for the first quadrille."

"But do you know I had been engaged to Lord Exmoor for the last fortnight ? Besides, next to yourself and that peculiar Lord Ellesdon, whom you seem rather to admire, he was the greatest person in the room, — was he not ?"

Lord Oswestry laughed, and stood looking down on her absorbed, as he often was in her presence. Her beauty, her artlessness, and that peculiar feeling of tranquillity which some people seem to impart, soothed him like a spell.

And as he never made love to her, and it never crossed her mind that he would, she treated him with all the freedom, — not of a brother, she never pictured him in that relation, but rather as if he had been the elder brother of Sir Alban.

He roused himself after the pause of a minute, during which her intense gaze had rested on his face, as if she was waiting for him to speak.

"Lord Ellesdon a favorite of mine ! Not in the least, I assure you. But a single man, with his prospects — I should not be doing my duty as your guardian, if I did not present

you to such people. You can make your own choice afterwards."

"I wish you would leave a little of your duty undone; but I suppose, if I had all the logic of Bacon, I should never be able to persuade any man that I desired to remain single."

He looked at her with his brief smile, and made no reply.

"Lady Oswestry has sent me to take you to supper," said Lord Henry, coming up to Regina; "you owe me this, as you would not dance with me."

"No, thank you! I am not going to the supper-room," she replied, drawing back.

"Miss Howard is tired," remarked Lord Oswestry; and he made a sign to Sir Alban, who came forward and offered Regina his arm in silence. Her slender glove rested on it for the first time. Lord Henry, bending by her side, walked down the room with them.

"I am rather jealous of my cousin Oswestry," he said. "He is a first rate waltzer; but, on my word, it is too bad his engrossing you in this way."

"You, Lord Henry? you come out in a new character," she replied, laughing; "now you are jealous of Lord Oswestry's waltzing, — you are quite right. It is perfect!"

"You are too severe! But you know to what I allude; Lady Oswestry and I have been laughing about it — nothing would be so delightful as to see Oswestry the victim of an unhappy attachment."

"What nonsense grown-up people will talk!" she said; but she was a little perplexed by this banter, and she glanced from Lord Henry to Sir Alban, whose reserved countenance afforded her no glimpse of what he might think or feel.

Lord Henry left them at the door and they passed out into the corridor. The keen change of atmosphere made her shiver; and that trifling circumstance brought two things forcibly to her mind, — the chilling cold she had felt the night of Mrs. Willingham's death, and the time when Alban would

have noticed the slightest inconvenience she suffered, and when he used to wrap her up so carefully, to protect her from the evening air after her visits at Dykeham; and this was Alban, this frigid person who was walking slowly and silently down the cloistered passage by her side. Once she hazarded a glance toward him, and she was startled by the expression of his face, — he was looking so pale and stern.

They were at the foot of the staircase, and she was just withdrawing her hand from his arm, when it was seized, clasped with energy, and Sir Alban exclaimed in a voice that he could hardly control to make audible, —

“Regina! stop! I must speak to you.”

She felt as if she must have sunk down on the stairs, her heart beat so fast she could neither see nor hear distinctly. After a moment's pause — a struggle for breath — she returned, “What have you to say to me?”

“I have wished and sought for this occasion,” he said, “almost ever since I have been here; and now it comes, though I shall give you offence, I dare not pass it over.”

“Offence?” Her eyes raised to his seemed to say that it would not be easy to offend her. She was very angry at his folly for having delayed to speak so long; but it was not the sort of anger that could not be appeased.

“In every way my task is most ungracious,” he went on; and he still held her hand, and still every phrase was accentuated by the nervous pressure of his fingers: “Lord Oswestry has been my warmest friend; and you watched over my mother's dying bed.”

She looked all inquiring.

“Yet, for your own sake and for his, I must urge you from the bottom of my heart to beware of Lord Oswestry.”

She turned as pale as death. “Lord Oswestry! the kindest friend I now have in the world!”

“Listen to me, Regina,” he said, and he seemed as much agitated as herself. “Lord Oswestry, in all his dealings with

his own sex, is the very soul of honor; to me he has shown the interest of a brother; but there is a class of men who, where women are concerned, are governed by no law. I give you a most unwelcome warning; but you do not know the peril you are in, nor the arts you have to oppose."

"And this is added to the rest!" cried Regina, disengaging her hand and confronting him with flashing eyes.

"You think so basely of me, that you pretend not to see, in my single case, where a kind interest exists, without a thought of love or even admiration. You cannot see that a man (of his age, too) may feel some compassion, and even friendship, for a woman committed to his care! The case would be too simple with any other; but all *I* do is so distorted in your mind, that I am the object of suspicions which I cannot bring myself to utter!"

"I have gone too far to recede!" he exclaimed; "it must all out; hate me, look down upon me; I may yet do some good! I heard them talking of it in the ballroom; Lord Oswestry has never been without an object; one has succeeded another all his life. I need not veil the fact to you; you are in a circle where these things are freely discussed. He is not like many; his sensibilities, his feelings, are to be gratified. He is disappointed in his marriage; you know it. He is always fancying himself attached; he has always been successful; and now his heart is occupied, they say — they, smiling and jesting as they pass about the scandal — they say that his new attraction is for once to be found under his own roof. He loves his ward!"

"They lie!" she retorted, shaken from head to foot with a passionate gust of scorn and anger.

"Be warned, Regina!" he resumed; "you don't love him yet. Be willing to hear the bitter truth. He has every virtue but this — every merit, every attraction, if you please but this; but he loves you, and he has never loved in vain!"

"If it were worth my while, — if I cared to explain to you,"

said Regina, moved a little by the intense emotion of her companion, "what his conduct has been to me ever since I entered his house. He does not admire me, except, perhaps, just my singing; his wife is a thousand times handsomer! A modest woman (if you can suppose me such) always knows when she is admired. I am safe here."

But Sir Alban was unconvinced.

"You are ignorant of all your own feelings. You blush if you do but hear his footstep; you are happy when he is near you; you are silent and grave when he is absent; any one could tell by your countenance whether he is in the room; I have seen you tremble when he has offered you a flower. You are blind, not safe, Regina."

As Sir Alban enumerated these instances, she could recollect them one by one; and she knew it was some association with him, and not Lord Oswestry, that had caused her emotion. But this she could not and she did not wish to reveal.

"I prize his kindness and his friendship," she said; "I have good cause to value them when all others have failed me! I trust Lord Oswestry; and, still more, I trust myself."

He let his hand fall on the carved scutcheon at the foot of the balustrade, with an action of complete despondency. He had no more to say.

She gained her room in a tumult of feelings of anger, pride, and hope.

"He cares for me, or he would never have given me this warning," she thought.

As soon as she could arrange her ideas, she began to think there might be some truth in what Sir Alban had said. It might be true that people who knew Lord Oswestry's habits thought he was attached to her, and imagined that she might return his preference. This was all that could be true; and this was not enough to make her resign

the advantage of remaining with the Oswestrys until she was of age. No, she would prove to people, and Sir Alban at their head, that they were mistaken in their opinion of both parties. And when Flimsey removed the wreath from her beating temples, and hoped her young lady would sleep well after her excitement, she was far from guessing the state of perplexity in which Regina was left. She could make nothing of her position. She could not tell what to do. She could only look forward to June as the happy time that would put an end to all her troubles; that would, as she hoped, place Sir Alban as master of Beyminstre, and dismiss her to begin her cottage life again.

CHAPTER XIII.



It would not excite much attention, she thought, if she were to keep her room until dinner-time the next day. She was not in a mood to be teased by Sir John Lawler, nor bantered by Lady Oswestry about Lord Ellesdon. The guests would all be dispersed in the course of the morning, except Lord Henry, who was to go with them to town; and he was so perfect a cipher in her opinion, that she did not care whether he was there or not. Sir Alban was bound for Cheltenham to visit some Indian friends, and she supposed he would hardly stay at Piermont till the last minute. She was glad to be spared meeting him again, after what had passed. It would be difficult to know what to say or do if he were there to watch her every word and look; and she remembered, with keen indignation, that, though he had warned her of the dangers of her present position, he had

suggested to her no alternative. She should like to know (from curiosity) what he would advise. That she should go by herself to Mivart's Hotel, perhaps, and there await her coming of age! These reflections were interrupted by Lord Exmoor's little knock. He was come to breakfast with her, by appointment.

He brought her a large nosegay of wild violets, which he had gathered for her in the park before she was awake, he told her. Regina said she had been awake a long time; but she thanked and petted him, and placed him before the table, that he might pour out the chocolate.

"Miss Carleton is crying this morning, — so much, you can't think," said the child.

"I am sorry for that. Have you been teasing her?"

"No, I am always very good now. Cousin Henry's valet brought a little note to the door; but that could not make her cry, — could it?"

Regina said "No!" but she could not get the note out of her head. She supposed it must have been a farewell; but, as he did not leave till the next day, she rather wondered why he had not preferred a personal interview, which, with his skill and experience, he could have so easily obtained; but she was very glad he had taken a more distant method of proving his gallantry. Edith would cry, of course. Regina hoped that it would not be very long before she would feel that she had much greater cause to rejoice. She thought that she would go and see Edith after luncheon. No doubt the poor child would prefer being alone just at first; at least if she were to judge of others by herself. So while Flimsey packed, under her supervision, her bedroom door being left open, Regina gave Lord Exmoor a little biscuit jar, in which he was to arrange her violets, while she read out to him "The ugly duck," by Hans Andersen.

Then Mrs. Cleaver came with a scrap of perfumed paper from Lady Oswestry, to which Regina replied on another

scrap ; and the correspondence went on for half an hour, to the great amusement of Lord Exmoor, who collected all his mother's notes and ranged them along the table, insisting that Regina should tell him what she said in reply to each.

The tale was finished at last, and Lord Exmoor dismissed to his dinner. A showery afternoon gave her an excuse for not taking her regular walk. She drew her chair to the fire, took down a volume of Walter Scott, and, after reading till her eyes were weary, fell fast asleep. She was awakened by a loud rapping at her bedroom door, and the voices of Flimsey and Mrs. Cleaver in eager consultation.

"What is it, Flimsey?" she cried, starting up, confused by the bustle, and surprised to find that while she slept the twilight had come on.

"Oh, mem!" cried Flimsey, rushing in, too glad to be the first with her news, "her ladyship is in historical fits!"

"I took the liberty, Miss Howard, of coming to you," said Cleaver. "I thought if you would have the goodness to see my lady, she is in such a state."

"But what has happened? — Lord Oswestry" — cried Regina, hurrying with Cleaver into the gallery.

"My lord is just come in, I believe, Miss Howard; but if you would only go with me to my lady."

"But I don't know whether she would like to receive me," said Regina, stopping short; and, seeing Lord Oswestry coming out of his lady's dressing-room, she went up to him, and hoped that nothing serious had happened.

"Nothing serious to herself, Miss Howard," he said; he looked annoyed and contemptuous, but not distressed. "It concerns Henry Montresor."

"Has anything happened to him? I am very sorry for you both," she said, trying so palpably to get up an interest on the occasion, that he could not help smiling; but he looked grave the next moment, and said, "I am afraid you will be more vexed than my lady, though in a different manner. If

I can be of any use to you, command me." Then, opening the door for her, Regina passed in, and found her ladyship walking about the room, not at all in the melting mood, but with blazing eyes and dishevelled hair, in a towering passion.

"That worthless girl, Regina!" she cried, turning round fiercely. "I could not have believed it. I thought her a poor whining simpleton, but steady. And see what it is to rely upon any one."

"What girl?" asked Regina, while she felt a sudden pang at the heart.

"Why, Miss Carleton, my meek little governess! However, I'm glad of it. If ever there was a man to make a woman repent such a step it is Henry Montresor. He will break her heart, that's one comfort."

"Edith eloped with Lord Henry!" cried Regina, clasping her hands.

"Even so, my dear. Pretty, modest-looking creature! Mrs. Falconer always told me she was a sly one."

"Oh, Lady Oswestry! She was in the school-room this morning; Exmoor told me so."

"They went off after luncheon," said Lady Oswestry, calming by degrees, "so like Henry, — he would not get up an hour earlier to run off with the handsomest woman in England."

"But then, Lady Oswestry, — oh, it cannot be too late, — let them be followed. Oh, if I could but see my lord! She will be wretched, married to such a man. There is surely time!"

Regina burst into tears. Lady Oswestry laughed.

"Married! my dear, your *naïveté* is amusing. He, the most dissipated man in England, marry a little governess like that! Why, Henry *could* not marry, unless for money; he is crippled with debts. But you want to talk it over with my lord? I shall like to hear you! Cleaver, go to my lord's dressing-room, and tell him we shall be glad of his company."

"Oh Lady Oswestry!" Regina could hardly speak through her tears. "Edith could have had but one idea in accepting the addresses of Lord Henry."

"My dear, when you talk of addresses, depend upon it she knew what to trust to. Why, if he paid her attention, he either wished to break her heart, — as he sometimes does, — or to carry her off, which is more likely, for she is very pretty; but, either way, I will never forgive her, or him either," she added, between her teeth.

"I am sure of Edith," said Regina. "I know her well! I don't defend any woman who elopes; but I am certain that she has left your house in the firm belief that she goes to become the wife of Lord Henry."

Lord Oswestry had entered while she was speaking.

"I wish her joy of her belief! She will soon be *désillusionnée!*" cried Lady Oswestry, with a scornful laugh; "but she knew what to expect. Cleaver tells me that he used to steal up to the school-room of an evening, when she pretended to be ill. Now, really, putting all together, perhaps we had better not go into the details of the case."

Regina turned with a look of entreaty to Lord Oswestry.

"I wish I could serve you," he said; "you feel this very much; I am sorry for it."

"Oh, can she not be brought back?" asked Regina.

"My dear Miss Howard, this young person has gone of her own accord. I have no right over her. Had she been carried off by force or stratagem, — in fact, had the affair happened a hundred years ago, I should be already in pursuit of her."

"I am sure of this," said Regina, wiping her eyes, "that the moment Edith learns that he does not mean to marry her, will be the last instant she will consent to pass in his company, even if she leaves him on the high-road."

"We must wait now," he said; "nobody seems to have an idea which way they have gone. She must have slipped

out directly after luncheon. If she should prove worthy of your interest, you may still have it in your power to serve her ; and, if not, — but I hope, Miss Howard, that your regrets on this matter belong exclusively to the lady ? ”

“ Quite so, I assure you,” she said, earnestly.

“ And now, my lord having proved that he is not quite infallible,” remarked Lady Oswestry, “ I suggest that we all think about dressing for dinner.”

Decidedly Lady Oswestry was not so agreeable when you were in distress as when you were gay and happy ; there are so many people who are only kind when you are not in want of kindness. It was not a very cheerful dinner to Regina. All the guests except Sir Alban had gone. He took in his hostess, — Lord Oswestry gave his arm to Regina. The shock she had received about Edith diminished the awkwardness she would otherwise have felt, in meeting Lord Oswestry after Sir Alban’s warning. Indeed, she had been some time in his company before it recurred to her memory. They all behaved, outwardly, just as usual ; and in this consists the difference between really high-born people and the middle classes. The former are just as angry and quarrelsome, but they can slip on their masks quicker than the latter.

She could not but look at Lady Oswestry in her green velvet, with a gorgeous bracelet on her rounded arm, leisurely eating her soup, and raising her eyes to Sir Alban, as she engaged him in some trifling conversation.

“ Have you seen the Asclepias, Miss Howard, that Harley brought into the corridor to day ? ” said Lord Oswestry.

“ I hope they are not Hoyas ! ” exclaimed Lady Oswestry ; “ we shall have their horrid sickly odor all over the house.”

“ What are they, Edmonds, do you know ? ”

“ No, my lord, I do not,” replied that gentleman solemnly.

“ See Harley about it, and tell him that your lady does

not like Hoyas. I was not aware that they had any perfume at all."

"Oh! don't you remember, at the Peckham ball, that strange woman who was introduced to me, and would keep haunting me, with branches of Hoyas in her hair? I assure you (to Sir Alban) I fled into every corner of the room, with those dreadful clusters pursuing me, — so intent was she upon following up the introduction. I actually persuaded Captain Fanshawe and Henry Montresor (a sob) to dance with her continually, as the only means of keeping her out of the way."

Regina was astonished at her ladyship's self-command, but it was beyond her imitation. When they left the drawing-room, she told Lady Oswestry she was fairly exhausted, and she went to bed at once. Lady Oswestry, who was always kind to bodily ailments, came and sat by her, and insisted on her having some very choice tea made, and hoped she would forget all about that miserable little wretch, who had made her so bad a return for her great kindness. "For, my dear," said her ladyship, "how did she know but you might have wanted Henry for yourself?"

Regina came down to breakfast the next morning, looking pale and harassed. Lady Oswestry, who had just taken her place at the table, was speaking to Sir Alban. She made them a sign of recognition, and went to her chair.

"She has not slept well," cried Lady Oswestry, "after all the advice and the orange pekoe that I bestowed upon her last night. Now, my dear, be a philosopher; turn your thoughts to another subject, as my governess used to tell me; reflect upon your *Manteau de Cour*, or upon your silent earl, if you like that better."

"What earl?" asked Sir Alban, looking startled.

"Earl of Ellesdon! Do you mean to say he is not silent?"

"You see she smiles when I mention his name; that is a good sign."

"Who would not smile, Lady Oswestry?" said Regina, "you couple things so strangely together."

"Well, as my lord does not seem disposed to come in (he is having some more last words with his steward), I may as well open the bag and dispense the letters. Sir Alban has been casting impatient looks in that direction for some time."

"Your ladyship has an accusation for everybody, this morning," said Sir Alban. "I expect no letters; I am as little afflicted with correspondents as any one can be."

"Here is one for you, Sir Alban," continued her ladyship, "all the more precious for being unexpected; it seems to have followed you from the uttermost parts of the earth, — stamped and marked and re-directed, so as to be hardly legible."

"For me? — Yes! I had left Cairo, and it went on to Bombay, I see," remarked Sir Alban, while he unsealed the letter, "and back to Cairo again."

He stopped short — his color changed — his hands trembled; he looked across at Regina, but her eyes were bent upon the columns of a newspaper.

"I hope that you have received no bad news," said Lady Oswestry, remarking his agitation.

There was a moment's silence; Regina looked up and recognized Mrs. Arnold's handwriting, — the last letter she had ever written, which had not till that moment reached its address. So many thoughts and feelings rushed into her mind, that she turned quite pale, and felt faint and giddy; but her pride saved her from a scene.

"No bad news, thank you," he said with an effort; "not any news." And he rose and went to the window.

Lady Oswestry looked at Regina as much as to say, "What is the matter with him? Can you make it out?"

Regina sipped her tea, and looked unconscious.

At this moment Mr. Lefevre entered, with a request from the gardener that Lady Oswestry would step for a minute

into the conservatory, to decide what flowers she would take with her to town.

"Excuse me, my dear, and do the honors for me," she said, as she left the room, pointing to the tea-service.

Regina took her ladyship's seat, and glanced toward Sir Alban, who was standing, still reading his letter, by the window. "I cannot now reproach him for not answering a letter that he never received," she said to herself; "but, after all, that one incident does not change my estimate of him, nor his of me."

It required some courage, she felt, to address him; but after sitting a little while, in contemplation of the empty cups, she turned round, and said in a calm, distinct voice, "Shall I give you tea or coffee, Sir Alban?"

He came suddenly up to her, placed the letter in her hand, threw himself upon the chair next her, and looked into her eyes for a reply.

She met his gaze with her clear, earnest regard, folded the paper slowly up, and gave it him back, saying only, "I have seen it before!"

Lord and Lady Oswestry came in together; Regina went back to her own seat.

"That stupid Harley!" began her ladyship; "he pretended he could not cut the flowers without me. Why, Sir Alban, you have had no breakfast!"

"Thank you, Lady Oswestry, I have done."

"You have not begun, you mean."

"Have I not? Yes — coffee, if you please."

"He looks as if he had seen a ghost," said Lord Oswestry. Sir Alban tried to laugh.

"You must come up to town as soon as you can," said Lord Oswestry. "I feel pretty sure of the appointment; but still there is nothing like being on the spot."

"What appointment, may I ask?" inquired her ladyship.

"Military secretary to the new governor of Madras," replied Lord Oswestry.

"Dear me, shall you like going to Madras?" asked Lady Oswestry, turning to Sir Alban.

"Very much," he replied, with his passing smile.

"And when do you sail?"

"With the governor, I hope, in November."

"I don't think a hot climate suits you," said Lord Oswestry.

"I know it does not," returned Alban.

"Then why do you go to such a horrid sandy furnace as Madras?" cried Lady Oswestry, opening wide her beautiful eyes.

"Because, like Hamlet, 'I lack advancement,'" said Sir Alban, smiling again.

Regina remembered the passage, and that which followed.

"The succession is nearer then he imagines; blind that he is, — what does he think I mean to do? What will he say when I put him in possession? That I shall never know, for I will never see him again. If he should then wish to atone, it will be too late; there will be no way then left for him to prove his faith in me." While these reflections were passing through her mind, she heard, as if in a dream, the voices of the others talking and laughing around her, till she was roused by Lord Oswestry saying to her, —

"And you, Miss Howard, — among the many places you wish to visit, had you ever a fancy to go to India?"

"No, not quite so far as that," she replied. "I shall have an opportunity of judging to-day," said Lord Oswestry, "whether you have the qualities of a traveller or not; whether, for instance, when you have gone two or three miles, you suddenly discover that you have started without half a dozen important packets which you really cannot leave behind."

"Just like Mrs. Falconer! I am sorry to speak ill of a friend, — but she always forgets something when she goes on a journey."

The carriage was announced to be ready.

"Well, Alban," said Lord Oswestry, shaking hands with his cousin, "if you do not follow us soon, I shall think that a very particular motive detains you at Cheltenham."

"Oh, I think so, already," said Lady Oswestry, laughing.

"I am sure there is a lady in the case; but I can tell you she will have a hard battle to make me give up Mootee to her, whoever she is."

"Then, till I claim Mootee at your hands, Lady Oswestry, will you do me the favor to suppose that I am free?" asked Sir Alban, giving her his arm to lead her to the carriage.

"Agreed!" she said; "but, stop,—I declare, if it were possible, I should say that was Henry Montresor's voice!"

"I hope not," said Lord Oswestry, looking displeased.

"It's past praying for, though," she retorted, turning back to laugh at Regina.

At the same moment Lord Henry rushed in through the open doors, breathless with haste and excitement.

"I have no time for excuses! I cannot enter into explanations!" he exclaimed,— "but answer me, for heaven's sake! Do you know what has become of Edith Carleton?"

BEYMINSTRE.

VOL III.

CHAPTER I.



LADY OSWESTRY never went to town by the railway. A journey of sixty or seventy miles, she said, was very endurable in your own carriage. It was very well for her lord to rush up to London through these odious tunnels, only to arrive there a few hours sooner. The children, with a proper *cortège* of servants, had started early in the morning; Lord Oswestry went his own way, and Regina had a tête-à-tête with her ladyship. They travelled in silence for several miles, both occupied with their own thoughts; at last Lady Oswestry turned to her companion and said, with a little laugh, "Come, I forgive you."

"May I ask for what?" inquired Regina.

"For having been in the right, my dear; acknowledge that it is hard to bear. And now I will tell you all about it, by way of returning good for evil."

"Thank you, Lady Oswestry; I confess I am very anxious to hear all I can of Edith."

"I hope you appreciated my lord walking off with Henry in that sublime fashion, out of our hearing. Well, as you thought, my worthy cousin gave the little goose reason to believe that he meant to marry her; a different idea never

crossed her limited understanding; so, after playing upon her feelings in every possible way, trying neglect and fondness, and indifference and fervor, she allowed herself to be carried off to the railway station in a fly. Now we none of us know what we may be brought to, and therefore we had better not boast; but, rather than elope in a *fly*, I do think I would die an old maid!"

"Well, Lady Oswestry."

"Well, they went of course to London; he meant to take her into Wales, I think he said; but first of all, as it was growing late, he began to recollect that it was time for dinner. So they went into the railway hotel, and, while dinner was getting ready, my friend thought he could not do better than explain the relations which he intended to preserve in their future intercourse, threw himself at her feet; cried, I dare say (he is very clever at crying); laid all the blame on his father, and implored her to have mercy on a miserable wretch whose love was the cause of his fault, or words to that effect."

"And Edith?"

"It seems that she made no scene; she said that he had taken her by surprise; that he must allow her a few moments to collect her ideas, and begged him to leave her for a little while to herself. He reminded her that the step she had taken already had tarnished her character in the eyes of the world; she said she knew it; and he left the room; went and smoked a cigar, I dare say. When he came back Edith was gone; all his inquiries in the hotel were quite useless; nobody had remarked her. So, then, fearing that she had wandered out in the streets, and might lose her way or get into mischief (so considerate!), he furnished himself with a — detector don't they call it? — at the police station, and off the two set all over town all night. Finding all their researches come to nothing, Henry thought it just possible she might have found her way back to Piermont; so he took

the train, and burst in upon us as you saw. I promise you, my lord spoke his mind to Henry, in his having interfered with a person under his roof; but Henry was so sorry, and said so many fine things, that they shook hands, and now you will see him in town as much with us, I dare say, as usual."

"What a pleasure," thought Regina.

"The first thing I do to-morrow, will be to inquire among my friends for an ugly governess, and one who cannot sing a note; depend upon it, my dear, that singing is a very dangerous weapon. Little Carleton did not know how to make use of it; but certainly her voice was delicious. Even Henry, who cares nothing for music, used to be quite affected. Poor, little, stupid, ignorant moth, it is all over with her! For who will take her after this?"

"I will, Lady Oswestry," said Regina, quietly. "As soon as I am of age I shall want a companion, and, till then, something can be arranged, I have no doubt."

"But, my dear child, you can't go and live alone with a little girl like Edith, and one whose past life wont bear investigation. But it does not signify, you will be married, or at least engaged, before June."

Regina did feel very angry. Lady Oswestry's carelessness had first occasioned the acquaintance; her own near relation had caused the mischief, and yet she gave up the poor girl to ruin without a thought of doing anything for her.

"Then you think, Lady Oswestry, that Miss Carleton's future prospects are quite destroyed?"

"Utterly, my dear," she replied, letting down a little bit more of the window.

"Through Lord Henry?"

"No doubt."

"Then do you not think it belongs to him to repair the evil he has done?"

"My dear, people who have no money can do nothing; their hands are tied."

"They can do harm, it seems."

"Yes, but it is so much more easy to do harm than to do good."

"Don't you think he ought to marry her? and, if he has no money, — which I can't understand, — work hard to support her?"

Lady Oswestry, instead of laughing, for a wonder, looked with some curiosity into Regina's face.

"I suppose, my dear, he ought," she said; "but you will wait a long time if you wait for Henry Montresor to do what he ought."

Regina did not wait. As soon as they arrived in town she wrote off a note to Becky Halliday, her old servant, to tell her that, if a young lady were to present herself at Holmwood, she desired that Becky would show her every attention.

Edith was an instance, not so rare as some people think, of a gentle yielding nature possessing great powers of action in emergencies. A clear but limited understanding will act to the purpose; while a mind more fertile in resources, will weigh and hesitate and fail at last. The moment that Lord Henry told her that he could not marry her, she felt as if she had been stabbed to the heart; but she felt, too, that it was not a time to give way to weakness. To the first agony of the blow succeeded a terrible fear that he would not allow her to leave him. She, therefore, begged that he would give her a few minutes alone, and in that time she arranged her plans.

She had, fortunately, a few guineas in her purse. She had often been to London for the day, when she lived with her relations at Kensington; the streets, therefore, did not frighten her even by gas-light when she knew where to go. She walked for some distance before she took a coach, for she had a dread of being traced; then she ordered the driver to go to the coach-office in Piccadilly. To get to Holmwood, to claim the hospitality that Regina had offered, that was her one idea, — half fearful that it would be withdrawn now that

she had allowed her name to be so terribly compromised. She was just in time for the evening coach, and at ten o'clock at night, with whirling brain and trembling limbs, she was set down at the door of the old brick house. By that time she could hardly speak; and when Becky and Marianne ran out, half scared, to see "what the coach could want with them at that time of night," they were only just in time to save their unexpected visitor from falling to the ground. Edith murmured something about Miss Howard and Piermont, and that was quite enough for Becky. She despatched Marianne to get a bed ready, while she made some tea for the poor girl, and helped her kindly to undress. The next day Edith was worse, and Becky wrote off to her young mistress. Regina was very much distressed; she wished extremely to go and see Edith, but she had scarcely seen Lord Oswestry since they arrived in town, and she did not like to ask his lady's advice. She did not wish Lord Henry to know where Edith was; and, if she told Lady Oswestry, she felt sure the news would find its way round to him.

But, a day or two after she had received the letter, she was standing in the little well-filled green-house at the top of the stairs, opposite the drawing-room door, feeling very melancholy and idly pulling some dead leaves from a geranium, when Lord Oswestry, who was passing downstairs, put his head in to see who was there.

"O Lord Oswestry!" she cried, "I do so want to speak to you."

"I am at your orders," he said with a smile; "why, how forlorn you look!"

"I wish, if you please, to go to Holmwood for a day or two. I have a letter from my old servant, and she is in a little trouble; she would like to consult me, and it's a long time since I have seen her."

"Certainly, nothing easier. You are in no great hurry, I suppose."

"Why, it is rather pressing,—you look so incredulous ; but can you not imagine that things may be out of order in a little tiny establishment, and that poor old Becky would be beyond her wits much sooner than your steward, Mr. Stapleton?"

"Come ; what is it ? The pump wants mending ; or the lock on the back-door is broken. Cannot you write ? You see I am unwilling to spare you, you are so important."

"But only for a day or two."

"You must have your own way. How do you mean to go?"

"Hire a clarence, and leave Flimsey here, if you will allow me ; she would frighten poor Becky."

"That's well. Flimsey shall be your hostage."

"To-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow, if you please. By the way, Henry Montresor is in the drawing-room."

"Here?"

He laughed a little at her look of indignation ; and at the same moment Lady Oswestry and her cousin came out on the landing.

"We are going to look for some luncheon," said her ladyship ; "will you come, too, my dear?"

Lord Oswestry, who had begun to go downstairs, came back a step or two to offer his arm to Regina, and just saved her from Lord Henry, who was pressing forward to lead her down.

"How is it that I have not seen you this age?" asked Lord Henry, as they took their places at table. "Where have you hid yourself?"

Regina looked at Lord Henry, not knowing what he meant, — for she had seen him perfectly two days back, when he burst in upon them in such a singular manner, and it was not by her own wish that she ever saw him again.

Lady Oswestry burst out laughing. "Oh ! the tell-tale

countenance!" she said; "it expresses so distinctly that you could well have put off this meeting a little longer!"

"I hope not!" said Lord Henry in his most touching manner.

"Ah! I forgot I had something for you," added her ladyship, opening her little *escarcelle* of green morocco, embroidered with gold thread, and taking from it a common visiting card, on which was printed the name *Earl of Ellesdon*: "that was left yesterday, on your account, I have no doubt. He dines here on Saturday; quite time enough for you to order a new dinner dress, my dear, — white moire, I venture to hint."

"Saturday!" said Lord Oswestry; "then you must make haste back; we cannot spare you on that occasion."

"Spare her! where is she going, in the name of goodness?"

"Miss Howard has had a summons to Holmwood," said Lord Oswestry; "her time is not always her own, like other people's. Riches bring cares and duties with them. So, to-morrow and next day, we must make the best of her absence."

Regina felt that Lord Henry was looking earnestly at her; she turned to Lady Oswestry.

"My old servant makes the most of any little difficulty; and, in this case, I believe she does so that she may have the pleasure of seeing me again."

"Oh, my dear! I know what old servants are. I have a horror of them! However, you *will* come back by Saturday."

"I will, indeed, Lady Oswestry."

"The duke and duchess come to town the week after next. You know who I mean, — Lord Ellesdon's papa and mamma. I hope you will like them. It is important to you, you know."

Regina thought that would be rather a recommendation.

"But Miss Howard is surely not going alone?" inquired Lord Henry.

"All the way to Holmwood," added Regina, rather scornfully.

"No, why should she?" said Lady Oswestry; "why not give us a *fête champêtre* at your cottage, and introduce us to the treasure of a servant. And to-morrow I have not, as it happens, a single thing to do."

Regina would have slipped out of the room, but Lady Oswestry passed her hand through her arm and detained her.

"Well, good-by, Violet," said Lord Henry. "Good morning, Miss Howard!"

"Farewell!" replied his cousin. "Poor Henry, does he not look as if he were going to the Tower? Do you know I really think he is very fond of little Carleton! He looks wretchedly, and goes wandering about from morning till night, hoping he may discover her before it is too late. He had a faint hope that you might have heard something about her; but I said I was sure you would have told me, you are so good-natured."

"I ought not to speak ill of your cousin, Lady Oswestry; but I must say *his* anxieties are the last I should wish to relieve. I trust that I may yet have good news of Edith; but, if I do, I shall be in no hurry to communicate them to Lord Henry."

"It is a good sign for Henry if he has piqued you by this escapade."

"Not if I know myself; but I think he has acted like a coward! I suppose one may despise a baseness without any personal feeling in the case."

"Ah, my dear, you have been brought up in the country; you take everything too seriously. Men will be men. But the carriage will be round in five minutes, and I am dying to take you to Vouillot and Laure."

After a round of shopping they returned; the carriage loaded with parcels of all shapes and sizes, light and heavy,

with which Regina gladdened the heart of Mrs. Flimsey. The next morning she set off for Holmwood. Becky was delighted to see her, but she gave her a very poor account of her young guest.

"She don't eat, miss, and I think she don't sleep; and she sits all day in the chair by the chimney-corner, and never speaks a word."

Regina hurried upstairs into the drawing-room, and saw a little shrupken yellow woman lying back in the easy chair; she had to pause a moment before she could be quite sure it was Edith.

Their meeting was very affectionate. Regina would not talk of the past; she put that off, she said, till her friend was stronger.

"I have heard how it all happened, dear Edith," she said; "I was sure you would act so. Now my plan is, that you stay quietly here till I am of age, and then that we go to the Lakes for the summer and autumn. Afterward, we will form fresh plans. But the first thing I do is to send off for the doctor."

His report was not very encouraging. He felt Edith's pulse, and looked at her face, several times during his visit. He said her nerves must have received a great shock; and, when he followed Regina out of the room, asked her age, and inquired of what complaint her mother had died.

"I do not quite know (the doctor was a very old family friend), but Mrs. Carleton was one of the wives of Mr. Morley, our late rector; and therefore I never attributed her death to any other cause; but I can find out, if you like."

"I wish you would; I don't like her manner of breathing. Give her plenty of nourishment, and keep up her spirits."

"I will, if you will tell me how."

The doctor stood and mused a little while.

"Why, I'll tell you one thing which you *can* do; and that is, don't suffer her to have any anxieties of a pecuniary kind."

Romantic young ladies are apt to sneer at these sorts of troubles, but they undermine the constitution more than you would imagine."

Regina stole a few hours from Edith to pay the Winters a visit, and on her return she met Mr. Brand walking across the common with Winny Hopper. He was as much surprised as pleased to see her again.

"I shall be so much obliged if you would pay me a short visit some time to-day, Mr. Brand, — if Miss Hopper will not be jealous," said Regina.

"Ask me, too, Regina," cried Winny; "I have so much to talk to you about."

"I am very sorry, but my interview with Mr. Brand must be strictly confidential," replied Regina, gravely; "another time I shall hope to see you both together."

In fact, one reason why she wished to have a little conversation with him was to tell him the outline of Miss Carleton's history, and to beg that he would, if possible, prevent Miss Hopper from intruding upon her, and persecuting her with inquisitive conversation.

He readily promised to do everything in his power to avert Winny's suspicions from Regina's guest, and expressed great commiseration for Edith's history.

"And what have you done about Beyminstre?" he asked.

Regina colored crimson.

"Have you thought better of it, and determined to maintain what is certainly your right?"

"No, but I feel shy at opening the subject with Lord Oswestry."

"We are almost in May," remarked Mr. Brand.

"Yes, I have but little time to lose. I shall grow brave when there is no help for it. And when I want to consult your brother, will you give me a letter to him?"

"Certainly, as soon as you have spoken to your guardian."

"And will you allow me to ask you to stand by Miss Carle-

ton in any difficulty she may meet with here — if, for instance that worthless man should follow her to Holmwood?"

"I shall be glad to serve her in any way."

She was very sorry to leave Edith, but she was pledged to return, and she could only arrange everything for her comfort and protection.

"Till June, dear Edith," she said when her clarence was announced; "and then what a delightful tour we will have together."

Edith tried to smile as she hung round her neck.

"Does he know that I am here?" she whispered.

"No, you do not wish him to be told?"

"No, and yet — he will be so very wretched!" and her tears began to fall.

"I am afraid, if he learns where you are, he will try to see you."

A half smile appeared through the tears. "I should like very much that he was told I was safe, and kindly cared for — though we shall never meet again."

"The next time I am able to speak to him, I will give him your message. I may say, you never *wish* to meet again?"

Her "Yes" was scarcely audible.

"Decidedly I have never been in love," thought Regina, as she leaned back in her carriage: "all this is quite beyond me. I am sure that, in her place, I should feel nothing but contempt and anger for the man —

'Where I find worth,
I love the owner till he let it go,
And then I follow it!'

CHAPTER II.



MAY have my faults," said Lady Oswestry, as she was sitting with Regina over her dressing-room fire; "I hope, I am sure, that I have, since I devoutly hate perfect people; but I am not quite come to such a pass as to forget your *moire* dress. I want you to look very dazzling, because Lord Ellesdon will be accompanied by his venerable mother. I rather think she suspects he has an object, and she runs up to town to form her opinion on his choice. I immediately flew to call upon her, and entreat her to dine here; and the readiness with which she accepted, considerably enlightened me upon her motives."

"Is she very old?" asked Regina, laughing.

"No, my dear, not very old; but she is a learned lady, and does not exactly suit me."

"Is she fierce?"

"No, not fierce; but so wonderfully well-informed she takes my breath away."

"Lord Ellesdon ought to be something more than he is, with such a superior mother."

"Oh, my dear! he has all the talents and all the virtues, only he is so dull; but you have wit enough for both; and he is not bad-looking."

"Do you think, Lady Oswestry, seriously, that I wish to make a conquest of Lord Ellesdon?"

"I am afraid not, you perverse creature! I would give something to know who it is that makes you so inflexible. But there is the dressing-bell; to arms!"

Regina was standing on the hearth-rug, talking to Lord Oswestry, before dinner, the opal lights gleaming on her white *moire* dress, and one slender foot, resting on the cor-

ner of the fender, when the Duchess of Clareville and her son were announced. She slipped into a low chair, a little in the background, hoping to pass unnoticed, and to reconnoitre the formidable duchess at her leisure ; but Lady Oswestry lost no time in advancing toward her, saying, "Let me present Miss Howard to your grace ;" and she had to rise and bow, and to receive the greeting of Lord Ellesdon, before she could glide into obscurity again.

The duchess was rather tall, with a fine figure and a still beautiful complexion ; her fair hair, between the lights, seemed hardly touched with gray. She had a sweet maternal countenance, such as some of the Italian painters are fond of giving to the Virgin. She wore a small three-cornered handkerchief of point lace at the back of her head, fastened with turquoise-headed gold pins, and a large point shawl enveloped her almost from head to foot, and softened the tint of her blue silk gown. To Regina's surprise, her grace took the chair next her, and said in a delightful voice, that charmed her at once : —

"This is your first season in town, Miss Howard ?"

"It is ; but I ought to tell your grace that I am a very old *débutante*."

"I know you are a minor," said the duchess, "and I hear that you have very lately succeeded to this large property."

"Nearly three years ago," said Regina, with a sigh.

"Then you are doubtless by this time weary of congratulations."

"I have not received many ; but they would be very much misplaced in my case. The bequest has been a source of the greatest annoyance to me, ever since I first heard of it."

"Indeed ! Have the relatives disputed the will ?"

"Oh, no ! but grandmamma thought with me, that it was right to make over the property to the heir-at-law, and there were so many difficulties in the way," said Regina, wonder-

ing at her own frankness, which seemed drawn out by something gentle and cordial in the manner of the duchess.

"And now?"

"Yes, I shall go on trying; that is, as soon as I have consulted my guardian."

"I hardly know whether it is a friendly wish to hope that you will succeed?"

"I should think it very friendly; for of what use is so much money to a single woman, brought up in retirement?"

"But I imagine that Miss Howard will not always be a single woman?"

"It is very odd," said Regina, naturally. "Nobody seems to think I can be in earnest; but surely there are found now and then some women who do not wish to marry; it is only strange to me there are not more."

"I could answer you," said the duchess, graciously, "in the words of Viola to Olivia;" and she rose as she said so, for Lord Oswestry came to lead her down to dinner.

Regina was very glad to have had this little conversation with the duchess; for, though it was very likely that Lord Ellesdon had no thoughts of her, if he had, it would put him on his guard; and, if he had not, it would clearly show that she had no designs upon *him*.

Lord Ellesdon took pains to say a few words to her in the evening, a few *last* words, she thought, with some amusement. He asked her if she was pleased with the change from Piermont to Portman square? and she replied, "Yes, while the cold winds lasted she did not regret the country; she knew how the flower-beds were looking, all withered up for want of rain."

"Was she fond of gardening?" he asked.

"Yes, lazily fond of it; very fond of seeing others work."

"Young ladies were generally fond of a garden in that way," Lord Ellesdon thought.

The duchess was close to them, and Regina, turning to

her, exclaimed in her odd manner, — “Madam, Lord Ellesdon calls me a young lady.”

“What a libel!” said the duchess, laughing.

Lord Ellesdon looked at her as you might look at the wheels of a clock, — with a kind of puzzled curiosity.

“I have a favor to ask of you, Miss Howard, *already*,” said the duchess. “I mean to give a fancy ball in the course of a few weeks, and I have a desire to open it by a Pavin danced in costume; will you be one of the twelve *young ladies* who will be wanted for the figure?”

“I should feel myself highly honored,” answered Regina; “but I know nothing of the dance.”

“I have engaged a ballet-master to teach the figure at my house,” said the duchess; “our lessons begin next week; say you will make one of the pupils, dear Miss Howard!”

There was something so sweet in her manner, that Regina was quite won.

“Willingly,” she replied; “if your grace will permit me to make one condition.”

“Anything you like,” said her grace; “I shall be truly glad to retain you on your own terms.”

“Then I shall be obliged to you to find me the most unconsidered little individual for a partner, if any obscure person is admitted to your ball; for I hope and think that I have not the claim to consideration that is at present supposed; and people would regret afterward that they had distinguished me under false pretences.”

Lord Ellesdon’s countenance became rather more enlightened. The duchess exchanged a glance with him, expressive of satisfaction.

“I would not take the liberty of paying you a compliment, Miss Howard,” she said; “but you must allow me to say, as a general remark, that beauty is, quite as much as wealth, a passport to these things in our best society.”

“And, let me add,” said Lord Ellesdon plainly, “that if

Miss Howard will do me the honor to accept me as her partner, I will dance the Pavin ; and if not — not."

"I hope Miss Howard will yield to that declaration in the style of the Spanish juntas, *Se no, no !*" said the duchess, laughing.

"I can do no less," answered Regina, satisfied with having explained to the duchess the insecurity of her prospects, and glad at least that Lord Ellesdon would save her from a disagreeable partner.

The guests were dispersing, as they do at a London dinner, directly they have drunk a cup of tea.

"We are going to the opera," said the duchess.

"And so are we," replied Regina ; "and it will be half over."

"You must promise to accompany me some evening," said the duchess, "when the gentlemen dine out, and we are able to be in time for the overture."

"Now !" said Lady Oswestry, stepping daintily over the cocoa-nut matting, unrolled between her door and her carriage ; "now, my dear, you may be Lady Ellesdon as soon as you please — the duchess approves of you."

Regina laughed, and said she thought Lord Ellesdon might as well be a little consulted.

"My dear, whatever the duchess wishes — he wishes ; besides with those people, marriage is always rather a duty than a pleasure."

"Thank you, Lady Oswestry ! If I had any lingering ambition to be a duchess, that little bit of candor would decide me ; but I think the present duchess charming !"

"She was a great beauty once, my dear ; but now she is turned blue. She is going to-morrow to the Literary Institution, to hear a horrid man in spectacles lecture on geology. It is a sad thing to grow old," added her ladyship, playing with her fan ; "but there is no need to make matters worse by growing blue."

Lord Henry was at the door to help them out, and he accompanied them to his cousin's box. He pretended, as usual, to be on very familiar terms with Regina, and as nearly as possible spoiled her pleasure in the last act of *Norma*. Once, when he had been pressing upon her the use of his immense glasses, which made her head ache and tired her arm, she said, as she returned them to him, "I have been desired, Lord Henry, to give you a message from a person" —

"Yes, I understand," he said, drawing closer to her.

"She told me to say that she was safe, and well cared for, and that she never desired to see you again."

"Thank you," he replied, but he did not seem very much concerned by the intelligence; and, turning to his cousin, he asked, "Where was my lord?"

"At the house — where he lives, I think," returned Lady Oswestry; "we see little enough of him, — don't we, Regina? Unless he is behind the scenes, which is very possible."

Lord Henry laughed, and Regina colored and felt pained.

"I wonder," said Lord Henry, as he was helping Regina to put on her white cloak after the *ballet*, "whether, by any chance, I shall see you to-morrow, if I come to luncheon?"

"Most likely," she answered; "because that is a meal which I never neglect."

And she half hoped that he might have just so much decency left, to wish to find out from her a little more about Edith Carleton and her prospects, which he must know he had so cruelly injured.

But Lord Henry had no such intention.

As soon as he arrived at his chambers in the Albany, he wrote the following affectionate letter to his friend Winny:—

"DEAR MISS HOPPER, — I trust that you have not quite forgotten those delightful days, of which I retain so vivid a remembrance, which we passed together at Piermont. If I.

could hope that I should not be quite unwelcome, it would give me much pleasure to run down to Holmwood some morning, to talk over old times with you. By the way, I rather think the pretty little governess, Miss Carleton, is somewhere in your neighborhood. If you have chanced to meet her perhaps **you** will have the goodness to let me know ; for Miss Howard is rather anxious to learn how she is going on.

“ Yours faithfully,

“ HENRY MONTRESOR.”

To describe the capering and prancing which took possession of Winny when she received this billet, would be impossible to those persons who are so unhappy as not to know her. She was so exalted that she would hardly answer Mr. Brand at the school, and snapped at the mistress, who simply asked her whether she had any stockings to mend, as the third class wanted work. Her clogs cut the polka step all the way home, while her eyes were hardly visible, so beaming were her smiles. By return of post she had despatched the following reply, with a sealing-wax kiss outside : —

“ DEAR LORD HENRY :

“ Dear friend, — Truly shall I rejoice to see you in my cottage abode at Holmwood. Mamma, who is lame and weak, need not prevent you from hastening to see one who sincerely longs to behold you again. Much, I hope, you have pondered over *Tractarian Errors* since we met. I have a sweet tract, which I would send, but that I fear it is over-weight. The young person you inquire about is established in Miss Howard’s own cottage here, and therefore her anxiety is all a *pretence* ; but Regina was always *sly* ! I much fear Miss Carleton is not open. She has more than once declined seeing *me*, but Mr. Brand has called *twice* ! Fain would I write more, but I trust soon to meet. Do not delay to visit your faithful friend,

“ WINNIFRED F. HOPPER.”

These precious lines had not yet arrived to gladden the eyes of Lord Henry, when he reached Portman square the next day.

Lady Oswestry was alone.

"What is this about Miss Howard?" he asked. "Has that meddling duchess engaged her to dance in her show. On my word, I would as soon a woman figured before a booth at a fair as in one of these fancy quadrilles!"

"Henry turned prude!" laughed Lady Oswestry; "but, seriously, I would rather Regina married Lord Ellesdon than you."

"Thank you! I mean to ask her though; unless you think she is too much shocked by that foolish affair with the little Carleton."

"I do not believe she likes you less than she did. You never had any chance; you went to work the wrong way."

Regina came in just as they were sitting down to table. She bowed to Lord Henry, but took no farther notice of him, and ate something near her, as if in haste to be gone as soon as she could. Lady Oswestry tried to bring her into the conversation; she answered her, but relapsed into silence at once. In fact, she was thinking of her own affairs, and was not in the least occupied with Lord Henry.

"You had something of a fright coming home last night," said Lord Henry, determined to make her talk.

"Our wheel caught in another carriage," she said.

"Were you much alarmed?"

"No, it was over in a minute."

"Lord Ellesdon heard of it, somehow or other," said Lady Oswestry; "for he called at the door to inquire after us before you were awake this morning."

"A charming person, Lord Ellesdon!" said Lord Henry.

"Very well behaved," said Regina.

Lady Oswestry laughed ironically; and Regina remem-

bered that, in one sense, Lord Henry could not be said to be well behaved.

"I wish you would let me give you some strawberries," asked Lady Oswestry.

"I have done, thank you," answered Regina, as she rose from table with a handful of little biscuits. "I suppose I may give these to the dogs, Lady Oswestry?"

"What! do you patronize those detestable spaniels, Miss Howard?" exclaimed Lord Henry.

Regina did not hear him; she piled up the biscuits in the palm of her hand, and walked out of the room.

"What is it? Pique?" he asked, turning to Lady Oswestry.

"It looks like it," returned her ladyship rising.

"Shall I speak at once, then, or wait?"

"Take your own way; but I repeat to you, for your comfort, if she sees the affair in the light of an arrangement, you may succeed, but not unless."

Regina was in the drawing-room, sitting on a low footstool, with the three spaniels on their hind legs begging. She turned her beautiful head as Lord Henry approached her, expecting to see him followed by Lady Oswestry.

He took the corner of the sofa that overlooked, as it were, her position; and, bending toward her with anything but the manner of a lover, he said, "Miss Howard, may I beg the favor of a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"A few minutes by all means," she replied; "but I am expecting the carriage directly; we are going to Holmes's about a shawl."

"A very short time is all I desire," he continued; "a very few minutes will be sufficient to let me know what I have to hope or fear."

She looked up, threw the fragments hastily to the dogs, and took a chair (which, by the way, he did not offer her) directly opposite to him.

"Miss Howard; I believe most men would begin what they had to say with a tribute to your beauty and merit, of which, however, no one is more sensible than myself; but" —

"Oh, yes! 'pass that,' as Olivia says; come to your speech," answered Regina, with a smile; "besides, that has nothing whatever to do with your present business." For she naturally thought he meant to send Edith some message through her, in answer to the one she had given him.

"I convey the highest tribute to your sense and temper in speaking so plainly. I am past the age Miss Howard, for romantic attachment; moreover, I can't afford it. If I marry, I must strike a bargain! After this, if I said that I adored you, I could not expect you to believe me; and yet, perhaps, it would be nearer the truth in my case than in that of half your other suitors. The question now between us is this. Do you think my name, my position in the world, worth your purchase? I have been led to hope that you may."

"Not by me?" inquired Regina, anxiously.

"No; by some mutual friends."

"That is well. I thought *I* could hardly be accused of making advances. I thought it was almost impossible for any one, without positive affectation, to creep more constantly into the background than I have done. And I thought (pardon me), from the first evening that I was in your company, that you, a gentleman, had given a gentlewoman to understand that you wished to become her husband; and I should as soon have expected an offer from my Lord Oswestry, or from your father, the Marquis of Shields."

"Indeed, Miss Howard, you quite mistake the nature of my sentiments with respect to" —

"I did mistake them, and so did she! I did not then, know that a man in your station could say one thing and mean another: more than say it; imply it with looks, actions

everything! I did not know that a gentleman could act toward a young woman who stood alone in the world, as he would not dare to do if her father (like Edith Carleton's) had not died for his country, and left her defenceless! Next time you attack the fame of an honest woman, have a little shame, a little vestige of honor, and set your mark on one who has a father to shoot you, or a brother to trample you down on the high-road; and not this cowardly, safe, easy triumph!"

"You are warm, Miss Howard," said Lord Henry; "you see my folly in a strong point of view. May I not hope that, when your anger has a little cooled, you will look with a more favorable eye upon my pretensions? My brother, Lord Pentland, has but one boy — and he is very subject to fits."

Regina could scarcely help laughing at the sudden turn he gave the conversation. She was vexed at her warmth,—not because she thought it greater than the occasion required, but because she felt it was a pity to throw away any real emotion on such a poor creature.

"Lord Henry," she said, "long before my anger has abated, I believe, and hope I shall be, if I live, a very poor speculation indeed. And then, I think my opinion of your conduct will give you little or no concern."

"I do believe, Miss Howard," he returned, "that you consider me incapable of any one good feeling."

And he did not seem very much offended either; for people must have some value for goodness before they are very greatly shocked at being thought bad, and Lord Henry dearly loved to talk about himself.

"The fatal circumstances that surround a younger son in this country," he went on, "early destroy all that is noble and ingenuous in the character, and compel us to that heartless line of conduct which I deplore, and would gladly see altered."

"Ah! that is all translated from some French novel,"

thought Regina. "I know it is French, because of that word 'fatal'—which English writers use only when they are going to talk of a death. At any rate, Lord Henry," she said, more civilly, "if I do think ill of you, you think just as badly of yourself. Now, as I shall very soon disappear from *your* world, I may be allowed to act in one respect like a person who has not long to live, and I will therefore permit myself to offer you a little scrap of advice,—tilting with windmills," she added with a sad smile.

"Most happy, I am sure," murmured Lord Henry.

"The only chance for your becoming any better than you are,—and you seem to agree with me that there is room for improvement,—is, to marry Edith Carleton. Though I hope, I am sure, she would not have you."

Lord Henry started.

"As to your saying you are too old to love, you got that idea out of your French novel, along with the fine speech you said just now. It may be true of Frenchmen, but I am sure it is not true of Englishmen. Nobody is too *old*, but a great many people are too *bad*, to love what is beautiful and good. You love her as much as you can anybody, which is not enormously. But,—I can't think what brings Don Quixote into my mind,—honest Sancho would say that half a loaf is better than no bread, and, if you can only love a little, even that little might save you from becoming like those awful old men in the club windows, who seem to me to want a missionary excessively. But you won't; nobody takes advice. You will go begging from year to year, until you find a rich woman to accept you, and bring discord and misery into your home."

"And why, Miss Howard, should not a rich woman love me as well as a poor one?"

"Because you will not love her; and no woman can bear that long, however she may begin."

Lord Henry would gladly have sat there talking about

himself till night ; but she rose with a slight smile, and moved to the door, saying something as she went about looking for Lady Oswestry.

CHAPTER III.



OW that Regina had dropped a hint to a comparative stranger of her intentions with respect to Beyminstre, she felt that, in common propriety, she could no longer delay speaking to her guardian.

She made up her mind to take the first opportunity to ask for an interview ; but Lord Oswestry was full of business, and she felt that it would be a very difficult matter to glide in her request for an audience.

"So you are fixed to wear blue and silver brocade," said Lady Oswestry ; "it's a pity ; rose and silver is so much more becoming, and lights up so well."

"But Miss St. Clair, the duchess's niece, wears pink and silver, and we are to be all different."

"Pink, with red hair !" exclaimed her ladyship ; "is not it astonishing that people can be so blind ? But you ought to wear a diamond stomacher. Don't you think, my lord, Regina ought to wear the Beyminstre diamonds ?"

"Not the least objection," said Lord Oswestry, absorbed in his paper.

"I had rather not, Lady Oswestry," answered Regina.

"But when you have them lying idle at the banker's, why not use them ?" pursued Lady Oswestry.

"I had rather not," persisted Regina ; "I hate Beyminstre, and everything connected with it."

"You unaccountable girl !" cried Lady Oswestry.

Regina had finished breakfast, and was lingering over the

flowers in the window. Lord Oswestry threw down his paper, and left the table.

"May I speak to you, if you please?" she asked, flushing with the effort, just as he was passing her.

"To be sure," he replied; "now?"

"Yes, I had rather," said Regina, who felt as if it would be now — or never.

"I'm very jealous, but I'll leave you together," said Lady Oswestry, laughing, and glancing at her Honiton lace cap as she crossed the mirror.

"Will it do here?" he asked smiling, and pointing to the breakfast service.

"Oh, yes. I don't want pen and ink," she replied, breathing quick, while her cheeks rivalled the red camellia by her side.

He sat down near the sofa.

"I have seen nothing of you so long," he said, "that I am quite a stranger to your proceedings; but this is the way we go on in London. You must excuse me, and tell me what you want."

There was a frank kindness in his tone that always touched Regina.

"I am sure you have shown me nothing but indulgence ever since I have been with you," she said earnestly.

"Well, then, you have been a little extravagant, eh? All young ladies are so. We must pay your debts; it's very natural; you are not exactly a beggar, with your fourteen thousand a year."

"O Lord Oswestry!" she exclaimed, quite horror-struck, "how can you think me so profligate?" (coming out, in her dismay, with the most inappropriate term, which made Lord Oswestry smile); "I don't owe five pounds, I'm sure, in the world; no, it was something I wished to explain, and I'm afraid you will find me very tedious. I'll try to make haste" —

"No, take your time, I have nothing to do; don't hurry; you are quite out of breath," he said, with the same kindness.

"When Sir Herbert left me this estate," she began, "he left also a letter for my private reading, which explained his feelings with regard to the disposal of his property. He left it to me under the mistaken impression that I was likely to share it with a person to whom he had bound himself by an oath that he would not bequeath it directly. It is therefore my intention, as soon as I can do it legally, to transmit this bequest to the heir-at-law, Sir Alban Willingham, in accordance with the last wishes of his uncle."

"You astonish me," said Lord Oswestry.

"Will you read the letter?" she asked, extending to him the dingy paper.

"But, my dear Miss Howard," he said, when he had glanced through it, "it is all very romantic, but there is not one sentence which need compel the most scrupulous conscience to give up this property. There is a contingency to which he refers; but, failing that, Sir Herbert even takes pains to express that he desires you to remain in possession."

"That is a contingency quite out of the question," she said decidedly. "Sir Herbert made a great mistake; owing, perhaps, to my long intimacy with Sir Alban's mother."

"Well, then, my dear Miss Howard, it is a flight even beyond the limits of romance to wish to throw away such a splendid position."

"It is not splendid to me; I don't, indeed, like it. I have early acquired other tastes. But that is not the question. I think it is my duty to repair the mistake Sir Herbert made and regretted. I shall be richer than most single women in my rank of life. I shall have twelve hundred a year, instead of fourteen thousand. Don't you pity me?"

"Indeed, Miss Howard, I must earnestly dissuade you" —

"I have resolved to do this ever since I first read that letter. It only remains to be decided whether, with your consent, I shall take the necessary steps now, or wait until the day after I come of age."

"It would be my wish to facilitate your plans in every way," remarked Lord Oswestry; "but, Sir Alban being my cousin, it would not look well that I should be concerned in this transfer."

"I am so determined, and the time is so near, that your consent can make no difference, except in kindly enabling me to begin a few weeks earlier. I don't want a public, grand consent, on your part; only tell me that you have no objection to my sending this letter to a Mr. Brand, a barrister whom I am anxious to consult without delay."

And Regina produced from her bag a letter, which she had received the day before, from Mr. Brand to his brother.

"A barrister! but do you know you will mortally offend your solicitor, Mr. Reynard, by addressing yourself to any other legal adviser?"

"But, Lord Oswestry, I should rather enjoy offending mortally Mr. Reynard—he is not a favorite of mine; I may send it to-day, may I not?"

"Why need you be in such a hurry?"

"I will give you one reason," said Regina quickly, and coloring with anger; "Sir Alban has not disguised the feeling (as far as manner can express it) that I have used some underhand means to obtain this inheritance. I long for the day when I can fling him the titles of his beloved Beyminstre, and have done with the very name and thought of the Willinghams and their wealth."

"I don't believe he has such a thought," said Lord Oswestry; "if he could think so for a moment, he does not know you so well as I do."

"Thank you!" she answered, with her ingenuous look.

"If there has been a — regard — between you," said Lord

Oswestry, looking steadily among the camellias in the window, "and if any misunderstanding has arisen to check it, — an alliance between you would be so very natural and suitable, that I shall be truly glad to act as mediator."

"Lord Oswestry," said Regina, with the most energetic negative gesture, "I had rather ally myself with one of your grooms!"

"Well, then, it's hopeless," returned Lord Oswestry, smiling; "or else I think you should make allowance for a proud man. You don't know what it is to be suddenly deprived of an estate to which you had always looked forward."

"I know what it is to be suddenly endowed with one, which I have fervently desired ever since to sink in the Red Sea," said Regina, as she rose from the table, and held out, in a half coaxing way, her letter to Lord Oswestry.

"And who is this Mr. Brand, may I ask?"

"Brother to our Holmwood curate. You may look at me as much as you like. Our Holmwood curate — a very good man. I am very fond of him, and he is very partial to me, and he preaches very good sermons, and reads Shakspeare to perfection."

"Odd if he were *not* partial to you!" said Lord Oswestry to himself.

"Yes; and there it ends; and I expect to find his brother very intelligent. This dear little gardenia, I did not expect it would blow so soon."

"Remember, Miss Howard, that, till you marry, my house will always be a home to you, as far as I can make it so, — a happy home."

"I marry! Dear Lord Oswestry, who will have compassion on me after the first of June? But, with the sincerest thanks to you for your kindness, I shall beg to retire into private life as soon as possible. I am in a state of bewilderment here."

"Well, then; is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Nothing more; and a thousand thanks for staying to listen to my petty grievances. If my watch does not play me false, it is twelve o'clock; and, if your committee is not waiting for you, M. Bourrelêt is waiting for his pupils at Clareville House."

"A little flurried at finding herself late, and perhaps rather excited by her conversation, Regina entered the gallery where they practised the Pavin, and found all the dancers assembled. The duchess was standing looking on, arm-in-arm with the duke, who was admitted for the first time to the rehearsal. Regina had never seen him before, and, as the duchess introduced her, she felt that he scanned her with more attention than he would be likely to bestow on any chance young lady. He looked at her as if he thought it possible she might be one day his daughter-in-law.

He had a forest of hair, in strong contrasts of black and gray, and keen irregular features. Regina could not help thinking of a Scotch terrier when she saw him.

Lord Ellesdon came directly to lead her to her place; as she was to be his partner, she thought nothing of that; he could not well have practised with any one else; but the scornful glances of the other young ladies, and their amiable asides, which they were very apt to make audible, made her fancy they were jealous of the notice she obtained. Miss St. Clair, as feeling herself the most at home, was naturally most desirous to show Regina these little attentions. She had long chosen Lord Ellesdon for herself, to the great alarm of the duchess, who knew that it is sometimes very intoxicating to a young man to find himself adored; but she was soon relieved by finding that her son disliked his cousin rather more actively than any of the garlanded young ladies he encountered in the ballrooms. Perhaps he detested red hair; perhaps the "ignorance crasse," of which his fair cousin rather boasted, annoyed a man who was extremely fond of scientific pursuits.

"Miss Howard," cried Miss St. Clair, "are you aware that there are two Richards in the field? Another great heiress has appeared; the daughter of a man who sells gin!"

"I did not know it," said Regina.

"In what way can your information possibly interest Miss Howard?" asked Lord Ellesdon.

"I thought it only kind to warn her that she had a rival."

"A rival!" retorted Lord Ellesdon. "It will interest a good many people to learn that any one has appeared who can at all be put in competition with Miss Howard."

"I had your interest also in view, *mon beau cousin*; since you have appeared in your new character, you ought to be informed of the state of the market."

It was now Lord Ellesdon's turn to color with anger, but he did not think it worth while to answer his cousin's wit. He contented himself with saying to Regina, in a low tone, "She is very ill-mannered, that young woman, but you must often have to put up with a good deal of ignorance from these girls; for they cannot easily forgive superiority."

The figures of the dance separated the young ladies for a few minutes, and then Miss St. Clair began again —

"I wonder you should wear blue, Miss Howard; I thought none but fair people could wear blue."

"I am not very learned in colors," remarked Lord Ellesdon; "but I think I know black when I see it, and I should say that Miss Howard was dressed in black silk."

"Of course, now," cried Miss St. Clair; "I do all justice to the costliness of Miss Howard's *moire antique*; I am speaking of the costume for the ball."

"You have driven me to blue, Miss St. Clair," said Regina, civilly; "for you had adopted rose color before I joined the set."

As she spoke, the duchess made Lord Ellesdon a sign, and he led Regina to the sofa where his mother was sitting.

"You are getting on very well," said the duchess; "do you begin to like it?"

"Yes, I think it is so much prettier than a quadrille."

"Do you think, my dear mother, you could stop that girl's tongue?" asked Lord Ellesdon, pointing to his cousin.

"No," said her grace; "not while she hath such sweet food to feed upon as Signor Benedick? It is you who put the little wasp into such a passion."

"I like that," he exclaimed; "I never speak to her from one week's end to another."

"Go, now, and ask her to waltz with you to-night at H—— House. That will soothe her."

"Only it is too high a price to pay for her good-humor."

"Well, then, go and say something civil to Lady Onora."

"Oh, if you have secrets!" he returned, laughing; and he went off to follow his mother's directions.

"And whereabouts are you, in your romance of real life?" asked the duchess, turning with great sweetness to Regina.

"Oh, I am going on so well. I spoke to Lord Oswestry this morning, and he was very kind — as he always is — and I am to have an interview with Mr. Brand, the barrister, very soon."

"Do you know Sir Alban Willingham by reputation?"

"Oh, yes; Lord Oswestry esteems him very much."

"He had a very bad father."

"But a very, very good mother — and such a beautiful woman!"

"You were acquainted with her?"

"Yes, — very intimately."

"Then Sir Alban is not quite a stranger to you?"

"Not entirely; but we are not friends."

And Regina felt the blush deepening all over her face; and, to explain it, she went on hastily telling the duchess that Sir Alban was very angry at not having Beyminstre, and she was sure he thought she had obtained it in some un-

derhand manner ; and she described to the duchess the two only interviews she had ever had with Sir Herbert ; she described her grandmother, and her early life at Holmwood, and told of all the annoyances that had followed her attempts to get rid of the bequest.

"I don't know why I inflict this long history upon your grace," she said.

"Because you feel that it interests me," replied the duchess ; "a little nature, a little truth, are so refreshing. But I am sorry you do not resign in favor of a more amiable hero."

"I resign to Sir Herbert's heir," said Regina ; "and therefore it is a matter of indifference to me what sort of a man he is. I dare say he will be a very good landlord ; and he has shown the worst side of his character to me. Beyminstre is his idol, and he could not forgive the person who took it from him."

"I should like nothing better than to be present when you restore it."

"And, if it is to be a public restitution, permit me to invite your grace in advance."

"You will not like the affair talked about?"

"I had rather not. I should be sorry Sir Alban heard it from any one but myself. Besides, I am not yet quite sure it can be done."

"I think I know enough of law to prophesy that it can."

"I have reason to believe it."

A servant in black now threaded his way up to Regina, and informed her that Lady Oswestry was waiting in the carriage to take Miss Howard home.

"Till Thursday!" said the duchess, as she shook hands with Regina and gave her to Lord Ellesdon, who led her to the carriage.

CHAPTER IV.



WILLINGHAM is come to town," said Lord Oswestry, the next morning at breakfast.

"If you had told me so yesterday, I should have been deeply interested," returned his lady; "but to-day, when I am thinking so much of the ball at Clareville House, I care for nothing else. I *hope*, my dear Regina, that your skirt will be well hung."

"Very likely, Lady Oswestry," said Regina, who was certainly not thinking of her skirt.

"She is dreaming about her bouquet," cried her ladyship; "this morning early a superb bouquet of Neapolitan violets was left here for Miss Howard, from the *Duchess* of Clareville. Well, I thank my stars I am not a hypocrite!"

"Is that to my address, Lady Oswestry?" asked Regina, laughing.

"No, my dear, you certainly are transparent enough. I was alluding to Lord Ellesdon, who seems to use his mother's name without much ceremony. He came to our box last night, my lord, and asked us if we had read Crichton, and called Regina *Esclairmonde*."

"Upon my word," said Lord Oswestry, "I suppose he will soon be waiting upon *me*."

"It *was* the duchess who sent me the violets!" cried Regina; "she promised them to me the last time I went to Clareville house to practise. Some of the ladies were abusing Neapolitan violets and the duchess agreed with me in liking their bitter smell, and she promised me some. And *she* called me *Esclairmonde*; Lord Ellesdon was only quoting his mother."

"He seemed agree to with her, at any rate," observed Lady Oswestry.

"I suppose I may bring Alban home to dinner?" said Lord Oswestry.

"Bring him by all means; but don't invite a herd of men to meet him; because we mean to be very quiet, and make no toilet, and then burst out in all our splendor about eleven."

"He is the last man, I should think, to notice your dress," said Lord Oswestry laughing.

"Oh, by the way, have you got his appointment?"

"I have got the promise of it, and he has come up to town to be introduced to the governor; but I hope it may end in his not going out, after all."

He looked at Regina as if to catch her eye, but she was leaving the room.

"Why should he not go out?" asked Lady Oswestry; "has he captivated an heiress down at Cheltenham?"

"Not that I know of; but such strange things do turn up; property changes hands in so unexpected a manner."

"I daresay he is going to marry a tawny princess," said Lady Oswestry. "He is just the man to make a crazy match."

"I don't think so, at all. I should say he was just the man, if he ever did marry, to choose some one who would be the envy of the world."

Regina had paused when he spoke of property changing hands, and addressed to him an appealing look, as if to entreat him not to betray her secret.

They met again just before dinner. Regina had had a most satisfactory interview with Mr. J. Brand, and she was in brilliant looks and spirits.

"What a slavery this life is!" remarked Lady Oswestry. "I have been half over the town this morning about my pearl net; but it is right at last; the tassels are flat and wide, like those to a cardinal's hat."

"I give you joy," said Regina; "I know those tassels

have been on your mind ever since the invitations came out."

"And you have been working with a vengeance," said her ladyship. "What could you have so particular to say to that very worthy and stout individual, who spent an hour with you in the back drawing-room?"

"Oh, some business matters; but it was the pleasantest interview! Lord Oswestry, I am longing to tell you all about it."

"No, no; keep it to yourself."

"I am determined" —

Regina followed him from one window to another, trying to make him listen.

"I will have nothing to do with the matter," he said, taking refuge in the last window; "here is Alban Willingham, talk to him about it; it concerns him the most."

Sir Alban was just entering. Regina turned and bowed to him as he passed her to pay his respects to Lady Oswestry. He returned her greeting; but, somewhat to her astonishment, just as she had recommenced her attack upon Lord Oswestry, he came back and shook hands with her cordially, and hoped she had quite recovered her health.

"I think you have only to look at Miss Howard to answer that question," said Lord Oswestry.

"She ought to be very thankful that she is in such good looks to-night, above all times," said Lady Oswestry from her sofa.

"Why, to-night?" asked Sir Alban, taking a chair by Regina, and fixing on her such a searching look that he could not fail to see that she was indeed more beautiful than ever.

"Because I am going to a fancy ball," she said in a constrained tone; and she felt suddenly shy and uneasy at the thought of her splendid costume, and the dance she was to assist in. She felt how he would dislike such publicity, if

he cared for a woman. She felt that, if their engagement had subsisted, she would not be going that night to Clareville House in such a character; at that moment, she would have given the world not to be obliged to dance even the stately and formal Pavin.

"May I ask whose ball it is?" asked Sir Alban.

"The Duchess of Clareville gives it," said Regina.

Sir Alban looked pleased.

"And I hope you mean to be very grateful to me for securing you a ticket," remarked Lady Oswestry; "there's your card on the chimney-piece."

Sir Alban could do no less than go up to Lady Oswestry's sofa to overwhelm her with thanks, and take his card.

"I know you have a beautiful Egyptian costume," said her ladyship.

"Oh, yes — a Nizam dress. Will that do?"

"I did not think you would go, Willingham," remarked Lord Oswestry.

"Why, it is rather out of my way; but I cannot do less than go, as Lady Oswestry has been so kind as to exert herself in my behalf."

But his eye returned to Regina with that distinct regard which she often remarked in Lord Oswestry, — where the glance falls palpably, like a touch, on the object looked at, instead of the unmeaning, powerless gaze of uneducated and ill-born persons.

"You shall not escape me now," whispered Regina, as dinner was announced, and Lord Oswestry led her downstairs.

"I am quite sorry you are to wear a head-dress to-night," he said; "it is a positive injury to hide your hair, and the outline of your head."

"Yes — it is all right! We have settled everything! — Mr. Brand is such a clear-headed man, — nothing is easier!"

"And Lord Ellesdon is to be Crichton, I hear — that gives particular meaning to *Esclairmonde*."

"Will you listen? That worthy Jew has been cheating us all these years; five minutes' conversation with Mr. Brand would have set all right from the first. He said he never heard of a more impudent mystification; but the method — that I will not tell you yet."

"I am really glad to find there's something you will not tell me," interposed Lord Oswestry.

"I shall soon be free as air! I feel as if I could fly,— like Ariel! Oh! how foolish it is for people to wish for money!"

"I suppose that was never your weakness."

"Yes — once. Oh, I could preach such a sermon; but I don't wish to be serious just now."

"I hope you wont marry a curate, after all!" said Lord Oswestry, as they entered the dining-room.

"I might do worse!" laughed Regina, "but

"*'Sta mejor sta mejor ser soltera!'*"

quoting a line from one of her little Spanish songs, which Lord Oswestry was never tired of hearing her sing.

"You don't mean to go on singing that all your life, I trust," cried Lady Oswestry; "but I rely a good deal on this evening. A certain gentleman will sing a second to that balad, if I'm not much mistaken, in a very different key."

Regina blushed. Sir Alban was looking at her with an expression of deep interest.

"And were you pleased with Cheltenham?" asked her ladyship.

"Not at all! — a glaring, overgrown watering-place!"

"I began to think you meant to come back with a Lady Willingham," said Lady Oswestry, archly.

"Did you? She would have been a choice production."

"What has become of Henry Montresor?" asked Lord Oswestry.

"I have not seen him this age," said her ladyship; "he has not been here, I believe, since Regina refused him."

They were now at dessert, and the servants had retired.

"I?—O Lady Oswestry! how can you say such a thing?" exclaimed poor Regina, her face crimson.

"You *didn't* refuse him? I'm glad of it for his sake; but I thought you did, you looked so very odd when you joined me after that interview. Perhaps you will say he did not ask you."

Regina looked so distressed that Lord Oswestry came to her aid.

"Nobody has any business to ask Miss Howard any such questions; let them ask *me*, at least till June; and, if Henry Montresor has any inquiries to address to me, I think I know what answer I had better give him."

And he turned with a smile to Regina. She tried to laugh, but she was much more near crying.

"Now, you must try and exist without us," said Lady Oswestry, rising in her slow, indolent way; "we are going to look after our dresses; this is not an ordinary occasion."

"What can have changed him so much?" thought Regina, as her maid dressed her; "how altered he seems! I could almost have fancied we were at Holmwood. He looked at me as if he wished to speak, so often. Perhaps it is I who am proud; but I cannot, and will not, bend to his pleasure!"

"No, I don't like it at all, Flimsey (to her maid, who stood with eyes uplifted). It is stiff and angular, and far too rich; the only thing that pleases me is this *coiffe* of silver gauze, which certainly softens the features."

It was, however, a beautiful dress; of that decided blue that particularly suits dark-haired people with fair skins, brocaded with silver flowers, and trimmed down all the seams with narrow silver lace. The jacket, with quaint tight sleeves fitting close to her slender figure, and a long veil of silver gauze hanging like a cloud behind. She went into the drawing-room at eleven, to wait for Lady Oswestry, who was never in time; and there she found Sir Alban, in his

splendid Egyptian costume of black and gold, standing by the fire ; for it was a bleak, rainy May evening.

"It's cold," she said, drawing near the mantel-piece.

He looked at her earnestly for a few moments, as one might at a picture that startles you by its perfection, and then replied, "Very ; true May weather ; much less bearable than January."

"Eleven o'clock," said Regina, looking at the timepiece.

"I suppose you thought as I did," he replied, "that eleven meant eleven ; whereas it seems very doubtful when we go, and I suppose that even you have no idea when we come away."

"When we like," said Regina ; "but I am rather anxious to be punctual to-night."

He looked at her as if he attached a particular meaning to what she said ; he was thinking of Lord Ellesdon.

"Do you find all this going out too much for you ?" he asked in a minute.

"No, because I go out but seldom ; and chiefly in a morning, to concerts and exhibitions. This is my first ball."

"Young ladies are not generally so moderate," said Alban.

"No, and if I had come to town three years ago, I should have been wild to go everywhere ; but three years make a little difference. I have had some things to sober me" —

Sir Alban made a step toward her with some agitation of manner ; then stopped short, and said, looking round, "Have not you a cloak ?"

"No," she said, laughing away the emotion with which she had spoken ; "I am forced to go without because of my ruff."

"But you do not mean to catch cold for the sake of your ruff. Oswestry, Miss Howard has no cloak."

Lord Oswestry, who was just entering in a Vandyke dress of murrey-colored velvet, with Venice point, came up to Re-

gina, and looked critically at her dress. He gave her a smile of approbation; and then said, "Don't trouble yourself about the ladies' cloaks; if Miss Howard should feel cold she will be very welcome to mine. But the ruff is the first thing to be considered; is it not? Will you waltz with me?"

"With great pleasure," said Regina, not daring to look at Sir Alban.

"After the Pavin, the Lavalta," said Lord Oswestry; "there will be nothing out of character in that."

"The light Lavolt, — I suppose it was a Sautouse," said Regina.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Lady Oswestry, sweeping into the room in her gorgeous Florentine costume. "Come, Regina! the carriages are waiting, and so is somebody at Clareville House."

"You are very wicked to-night, Lady Oswestry," said Regina, when they were alone in the carriage.

"No, my dear I only wish to tease Sir Alban a little; for I think he is beginning to be in love with you."

"O Lady Oswestry! what an impossible idea!"

"Watch him. By the way, how superb he looks in that dress! Poor Lord Ellesdon; I am afraid, if he were really to take the field"—

"Don't, Lady Oswestry; they neither of them think a bit about me!"

"Then, my dear, they are fools! — that's all! It is very odd I am not jealous of you. Why is it? for you are very beautiful, and very much admired."

"Because you are more beautiful, and more admired," said Regina, laughing.

And these two beautiful women entered the corridor at Clareville House, more gay and good-humored, and more pleased with each other, than any two beauties who alighted at those doors during that night.

It was evident that Lord Ellesdon had been on the watch

for Regina; he was at her side directly, and led her to the end of the ballroom where the Pavin was to be danced. He told her frankly that she looked very beautiful, and that his cousin had disfigured herself finely, and he hoped she would get out of sight as much as she could.

He did not look so well in Crichton's dress as he did in his ordinary costume. The low-crowned hat of Henry the Eighth's time would have suited his countenance better than the velvet toque and white feathers of the French court of Henry the Third.

And now the abrupt marked strains of the Pavin, composed expressly for the ball at Clareville House, rang through the room, and the dancers were led to their places. Regina looked round for some safe place to lay her bouquet, when Sir Alban, who was close behind, held out his hand for it.

"You may trust it to me," he said; "for I don't dance; and in such a crowd it would be a chance if you ever saw it again."

It was a crowd, such as she had never seen before; the space for the dancers was protected by red silk ropes, or they would not have been able to stem the throng. The dance was one great attraction; and Regina, though she did not think so, was another. The men were anxious to see the beautiful young heiress, who went out so very little; and all the young ladies were wild to examine the dresses of the dancers, and the figures of the dance.

They had all been trained, and all acquitted themselves well. It was a very graceful dance, and admired as much as the performers could wish. Of course, there were some amiable people who ridiculed the whole concern from beginning to end, but their opinions did not reach those most concerned.

Regina caught the sweet glance of the duchess from time to time and she never lost sight of Sir Alban, standing near and watching her, with her bouquet in his hand. She saw the rugged head of the Duke of Clareville bent respectfully

in conversation with an old white-haired man, the first glance of whom sent all the blood with a shock to her heart, for she recognized in an instant the noble features of the great Hero of England !

And through all the stately postures and pauses of the figure, her eyes were dazzled with a shifting crowd of gorgeous colors, glittering jewels, plumed hats, and strange faces, all turned toward her part of the room.

The duchess was close to her as the Pavin concluded.

"A great success, my dear Miss Howard!" she whispered; "and now show me which is Sir Alban."

Regina blushing, pointed him out.

"A very noble-looking person," she said; "you resign in favor of a *gentleman*. Is that your bouquet he holds?"

"For which I have very much to thank your grace," said Regina.

"Ellesdon, present him to me," said the duchess; and her son hastened to comply with her wish, while Regina tried to retire into the background, behind the ample velvet folds of her grace's Elizabethan dress.

"You have been a great traveller, Sir Alban," said the duchess.

"Yes," he replied, "but always on compulsion; he believed he should hardly leave England again, if he followed his own choice."

"You leave England soon, do you not?"

"In a few months," he said; "I return to India, by way of Egypt, where, I understand, Lord Ellesdon has some thoughts of travelling."

"Do you recommend it?"

"Very much; a traveller can see nothing more strange within the same distance."

"And the heat?"

"Almost intolerable in the hot season."

"Ellesdon!"

"My dear mother, you know I like heat."

"We will not go to Egypt!" said the duchess, caressingly, to Regina.

"It is the very spot Miss Howard most desires to visit," cried Lord Ellesdon.

"I've changed my mind," said Regina.

"Since when?" asked Lord Ellesdon.

"Since this morning."

The duchess looked at her,—so did Sir Alban; but they were not the wiser for their looks.

"Why?" asked her grace boldly.

"Because I am sure, now, I can be happy anywhere; and England is good enough in all conscience for people who are easy in their minds."

"Now, I would give a thousand pounds," said Lord Ellesdon bluntly, "to know what has happened,—this morning, too!"

Sir Alban looked as if he was quite willing to outbid the last speaker.

"I think I may relieve you of my bouquet," said Regina, holding out her hand shyly.

"You are going to waltz," he said; "you had better leave it with me."

Lord Oswestry was approaching to claim her.

When the waltz was finished, she refused all introductions, all entreaties to dance again. She begged Lord Oswestry to lead her to some retired corner, where she might rest in peace until Lady Oswestry should be inclined to go home. And there she sat quietly until Lord Ellesdon found her out, and insisted on walking with her through the suite of rooms, and showing her some celebrated pictures; and every one she met looked at her and her companion, and whispered that the match was arranged between Lord Ellesdon and the great heiress. And he took her down to supper,—having been his partner in the Pavin,—and people smiled and whis-

pered still more, and the duke looked intelligent, and the duchess delighted; and when Sir Alban restored her bouquet, and followed her to the carriage, he was more silent and more melancholy than ever. But when Regina put her violets into water that night, she could not help thinking that they had somewhat diminished in quantity.

CHAPTER V.



ENTER the Countess of Ellesdon!" cried Lady Oswestry the next morning, when Regina made her appearance rather late at the breakfast-table.

Sir Alban was breakfasting with them, and Regina did not much like the salutation.

"I wish you would not call names, Lady Oswestry," she said, as she glided into her chair.

"You were called so many last night," remarked Lord Oswestry, "that you are weary of them."

"Don't be bashful, my dear!" laughed Lady Oswestry; "*that's* the cream, if you have no objection; don't startle your tea with an oblation of honey; the duke is so pleased, he can hardly keep in his satisfaction; for all the world knows how fond he is of money, and he need not increase his son's allowance if he marries an heiress."

"It would serve him right if" — Regina began eagerly, and checked herself.

"That's right, my dear!" said Lady Oswestry; "marry from pique; I give you my word it will do as well as any other feeling. And you will be very happy; good husbands run in the family; the duke is a model husband, and the sky-blue duchess is a pattern wife."

Regina, with a discontented gesture, applied herself to her breakfast.

"What are you going to do this morning, Miss Howard?" asked Lord Oswestry, good-naturedly, wishing to change the conversation.

"The duchess is to call for me after luncheon, to take me a drive," she replied, looking away from Lady Oswestry, who burst into another peal of laughter.

"I would have nothing to say to a man who was too lazy to come courting himself," cried her ladyship. "Don't let the excellent mamma talk you over!"

"She does not wish to talk me over; nor does Lord Ellesdon!" exclaimed Regina, as she left the room. "It is hard if I cannot dance once with a man without all this gossip."

"Is there anything in it?" asked Sir Alban in an indifferent tone. "Is Miss Howard engaged to Lord Ellesdon?"

"You saw what I saw last night," replied Lady Oswestry; "she was the only woman he took any pains to be civil to."

"I saw that Lord Ellesdon was devoted to her, but that tells me nothing; it was nothing wonderful that he should seek to please the most beautiful woman in the room, except the present company."

"You are always so polite, Sir Alban; as for Regina, of course she will be only too happy."

"I beg to differ from you," said Lord Oswestry. "I am sure Miss Howard will never accept Lord Ellesdon."

"It is no concern of mine," remarked Sir Alban; "but I may be pardoned some little curiosity to know who will be one day master of Beyminstre."

"I have my own ideas on the subject," said Lord Oswestry; "but if you will go down with us to Piermont for the

first of June, when Miss Howard takes possession, I imagine that your curiosity will be gratified."

"I accept with much pleasure," said Sir Alban. "I cannot altogether shake off my interest in Beyminstre; and Miss Howard is so very worthy of her good fortune, that I should be glad to learn where her choice has fallen."

"If I were in your place, I should wish to poison her!" cried Lady Oswestry.

Sir Alban, laughing, disclaimed any such extreme measures; "beautiful women were still too rare to be disposed of in that summary manner."

"And when I think how the case might have been simplified, if you had chosen to behave like a rational being," said Lord Oswestry.

"Miss Howard is not to be had for the asking, and I am the last person to make the experiment," replied Sir Alban, turning away.

The duchess had received an invitation to Piermont for three days, to witness Miss Howard's coming of age, and, when she called to drive out with Regina, she brought her acceptance.

They had grown very intimate. Except the Oswestrys, the duchess was the only person whom she had any idea of retaining as an acquaintance, as soon as she returned to her old habits of existence.

"And whenever your grace has a little leisure, and a little curiosity to witness the genuine 'middle life' of this country," said Regina, "I expect that you will send me a line, and come to pass a few days with me in my cottage at Holmwood."

"That I will do with great pleasure," replied the duchess, "though I suspect there is very little middle life to be found, similar to that depicted in your Holmwood retirement. You mean to pass the autumn at the lakes, do you not?"

You will then be near Ellesdon Castle, and you must come to see me."

"But, you know, I shall not be alone at the lakes," said Regina.

"And your young invalid friend will not be your only companion, I suppose?" said the duchess. "Some elderly lady will reside with you."

"Do you think that quite necessary?" asked Regina.

"Indeed, if you were a relation of mine, I should very strongly urge it," replied the duchess. "You would be too young, even if you were plain, to live without some kind of *chaperon*."

"Can you help me to such a person?" asked Regina.

"I was just thinking of a lady who might suit you, the widow of a clergyman, — that sounds well, you know, — a mild, elderly person; not clever, but very good."

"If she is too good, she will not do," said Regina. "I mean, if she objects to my having Miss Carleton to live with me, when she knows about her having run away; because Lady Oswestry says that her character is lost."

"I will not conceal from you, my dear, that she has done herself very serious harm by that unfortunate step; but we must try to get her through it as well as we can. I am sure Mrs. Shirley will make no objection on that ground."

"Then I am sure she will suit me. Will you kindly write to her?"

"I will see her, for she is in town, and you shall meet her at my house; there is nothing like having an interview."

"She shall go to Keswick a week before us, and get everything ready for our arrival."

"How provident you are! Is your young *protégée* clever?"

"No, except in music; but she writes me that she has lost her voice."

"Is she beautiful?"

"I cannot tell you how lovely she was before her illness;

but I am sadly afraid that, for the present, her beauty has gone with her voice."

"And you think Lord Henry has given her up?"

"He would, if he saw her, in a moment; but I know he has followed her to Holmwood, and has been refused admittance; though I believe he is still hanging about in her neighborhood, for we don't see him town."

At last the day arrived on which they were all to go down to Piermont. Regina had often felt as if it never would come. She felt that her business was over with the London world. She had seen but little of it; though quite enough for one whose future life was to be passed in retirement.

She had seen some splendid entertainments, some of the best company, some works of art that she would not have missed; but, with the exception of the Duchess of Clareville, she had not met with one person, out of the Oswestry family, whom she desired to see again.

They had been at the opera the night before, and Regina came down to their late breakfast with a vague pageant in her head of the imposing groups in the Huguenots, mixed with the graceful spirit dances of the ballet.

Lady Oswestry, at the head of the breakfast table, was in brilliant looks. Sir Alban was talking and laughing with her; Lord Oswestry, a little apart, was breaking open his letters. The post is coming in all day in London, and he used to congratulate himself sometimes, on being able at least to breakfast in peace, instead of having to wade through a packet every morning, as he did in the country.

He turned to Regina with a smile, as she came in.

"You have been spreading a panic, Miss Howard," he said; "it is evidently known that you are going out of town. These are your concerns."

He selected three letters from the heap he had opened, and laid them down beside her plate.

"Good gracious! — *three?*" she exclaimed, casting her eyes down upon them over the rim of her coffee cup.

"Three! yes! — but I don't see how it matters to you if there were three dozen. It is I who have to write the answers, not you."

"I am very grateful," she replied; "but these are the last you will be troubled with."

"Well, your answers?"

"No, no, no!"

"One a piece — any reasons?"

"Anything that occurs to you, if you think proper. I do not see they have a right to reasons."

"You see, Alban," said Lord Oswestry laughing, "the work that is likely to be cut for you when you become guardian to a young lady."

"Not a very probable case," returned Sir Alban.

"Your turn will come," cried Lady Oswestry, "and I foresee it will be quite a novel. On your return to India, one of your brave companions in arms, dying on the field, in company with a smoky cannon, a moon, and three helmets, bequeaths to you — his only daughter" —

Here Lady Oswestry made her voice falter, and none of her audience could help laughing.

"You are incommoded, certainly," her ladyship continued; "but you cannot refuse — you accept the charge — you educate her" —

"My dear Lady Oswestry, have a little mercy."

"Be silent! I don't mean the slate and pencil part of the teaching; but you form her mind, you gain her heart, and at length you obtain her hand. A large fortune drops from the clouds upon the happy couple, and the scene closes."

Regina laughed, with a little twinge of jealousy toward the imaginary young lady. Sir Alban laughed too, not quite naturally, and glanced at Regina. Lord Oswestry,

still busied with his letters, now looked up and said, "Why, he has something of that sort on his hands as it is."

"And that took him down to Cheltenham! Didn't I say so? Regina, didn't I say he was gone there to marry a blackamoor?"

Regina tried to laugh, and said, "Certainly!"

"But why a blackamoor?" asked Sir Alban.

"Oh! we wont be particular as to a shade of color, but I shall think you very ill-natured if you don't tell me the whole history: my story will grow into a volume. I'll now write a Christmas book — sit down again, I am sure you can spare the time."

"I shall spoil your Christmas book, Lady Oswestry."

"How so?"

"By turning your poetry into prose."

"But I mean it to be prose, — so begin."

"You have described the scene with great accuracy, even to the accessories. A friend of mine did die on the field after the battle of Aliwal; there was even a moon, I recollect by the light of which he wrote in pencil a few lines of farewell to his wife, which he intrusted to me almost with his last breath; he also begged me, if she was ever in want of a friend, to give her all the assistance in my power. I promised of course, and told her so when I forwarded to her the scrap of paper containing her husband's adieu."

"Was she pretty?" asked Lady Oswestry.

"I had not then seen her, but I am happy now to inform your ladyship, that she is a fine showy young woman, with manners to correspond."

"Well! and she appealed to your protection? How interesting!"

"Yes! I had heard nothing of her till she wrote lately to beg me to come down to Cheltenham to give her my advice. She had got into some difficulty with a lawyer, who strikes me as being not good for much, — a Mr. Reynard; and, as

she backed up her request by a touching allusion to the promise I had made her dear husband, I lost no time in obeying her commands."

"Well! now for the interview — though there is a little tone of satire, Sir Alban, in your narrative, that I don't quite like."

"Well! I asked for Mrs. Ruthven, and I was shown upstairs. I noticed at the time two or three ladies, in fluttering dresses, were going up just before me, and there was a sound of music overhead. My name was announced, and I found myself in a ballroom, and a showy woman in pink and silver, who was waltzing past, whirled herself out of her partner's arms and came up to where I stood. She was all animation, — enchanted to see me, — had interrupted a most delightful waltz that she might thank me at once for so promptly complying with her request. I had been very intimate with her dear Ruthven, — had I not? (adjusting some of the roses in her hair while she spoke) — she was tormented about that little property in the north by a horrid lawyer but to-morrow would be time enough for business; the next dance was a polka; would I be introduced to her sister, Miss Maxwell?"

"And you stayed?"

"Yes; you see I had been a year in Egypt since Ruthven's death; my memory was too keen; it would be outacting Hamlet to affect any gravity then; we must take the world as we find it. I stayed; only I danced the polka with Mrs. Ruthven instead of her sister."

"I am very glad you showed such good sense," cried Lady Oswestry. "What would you have? It would be very unreasonable to suppose that a woman is to be constant forever and ever to the memory of the dear departed! The fair widow is now on her promotion. I, for one, wish her success."

Sir. Alban rose hastily.

"Is that enough for your Christmas book, Lady Oswestry?" he asked.

"Oh, I shall wait for the *dénouement*! I shall see whether you marry the widow."

"Really, if your ladyship pours such dark forebodings on my head, the sooner I leave your presence the better."

"But you have not told us yet how you sped with the lawyer?"

"I set a fiercer shark upon him, who worried him off his prey, in other words a sharper lawyer." As he spoke he left the room, accompanied by Lord Oswestry.

That evening the whole party were strolling on the terrace, at Piermont, by the light of the moon. Regina was leaning on the arm of the Duchess of Clareville, and discussing with her, in a low tone, her plans for the morrow.

Lord Henry, who had arrived at Piermont in time for dinner, joined them every now and then.

"Do you know, Miss Howard," he said, "all this reminds me of some old play I have read, where the lady gives a grand entertainment, and at the end of it declares the name of her fortunate suitor, which Oswestry says you mean to do?"

"I beg your pardon, I do not!" said Regina, decidedly.

"I am going to have an archery *fête*, because (turning to the duchess), when I was young and foolish, I used to long to be asked to the archery parties some neighbors were in the habit of giving, and I never was invited."

"And are they coming to yours?" asked Lord Henry.

"Yes. I begged Lord Oswestry to include them."

"Miss Howard, do you know Winny Hopper is quite hurt because you have not invited her? She says she always loved that dear girl, but that you never properly took to her in return."

"And, pray, how came you to be in her society, if one might ask?"

"Oh, we are quite intimate," he replied without the least embarrassment. "I happened to find myself in that neighborhood lately, for trout-fishing, and I called upon her. The fact is, I wanted some luncheon. I found her the most hospitable old girl in the world. She asked me to come every day, and I did. I found she had got a mother, who kept up the proprieties, you know."

They were going into the drawing-room; Regina lingered behind. Presently the harp sounded from the music-room, then the piano, — Lady Oswestry and the duchess were playing together. The delightful sounds, the streaming moonlight, the intoxicating odor of the orange blossoms, soothed her nerves; she stood, with her hands slightly clasped, the perfumed breeze just fluttering her white muslin dress, looking over the low terrace-wall into the park beyond.

The events of the next day filled her mind to overflowing; she tried in vain to dismiss them from her thoughts. She felt a little uneasy, too, about Mr. Reynard. She had written him a few lines, saying that, as he had been unable, during the last three years, to find any means of forwarding the plan that was nearest her heart, she had felt justified in taking another opinion, by means of which she trusted to be at last successful. To this communication Mr. Reynard presented his compliments, and begged to thank Miss Howard for her candor, while he wished to be allowed to say that, on the day of her coming of age, he hoped to add his congratulations to those of her friends, and to prove that he had not been wholly unmindful of her interests.

This last clause puzzled her. She had by this time learned too much of Mr. Reynard to expect anything good from that quarter; but in what way he could injure her, she was at a loss to imagine. She knew so little of law that he might cheat her in a hundred ways; but then, there was Lord Oswestry, who would not see her wronged; and as for Sir Alban, it was really not her business to watch over his

interests. When once she had surrendered Beyminstre, it would matter very little to her into whose hands it passed.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a footstep, and, turning a little toward the person who drew near, she found herself face to face with Sir Alban.

"Lady Oswestry has sent me to you, Miss Howard," he said, "to beg that you will not take cold. Let me put on your shawl."

"I am much obliged to you both," said Regina, accepting the shawl he had brought with him; "but I never take cold."

"You will have a fine day to-morrow, Miss Howard."

"Yes, I think it will be fine."

"It is a day to which many have looked forward with great interest."

"I suppose so; anything of a *fête* is interesting in the country."

"It will be interesting to me, because they tell me I shall then learn who is to be master of Beyminstre."

"You will, Sir Alban."

"Its mistress is in my thoughts, so unparalleled that I may be excused, perhaps, some curiosity as to the person she means to honor with her hand."

"By the way," said Regina, forcing herself to speak easily; "I have long wished to restore to you this ring, but I have never found an opportunity. If you should chance to have preserved the lock of hair you received at the same time, perhaps you will be so good as to destroy it. If it is lost, that will do as well."

She held out the opal ring as she spoke.

"I will do so," he replied, taking the ring: "you have a right to be obeyed."

"I suppose Lady Oswestry expects me," she said, as she walked toward the entrance.

"Miss Howard! Regina!" said Sir Alban, following her;

"Perfectly!" she replied with a slight touch of irony in her voice; "never was any one more intelligible."

He drew back as if hurt.

"You must long have been disposed to allow," Regina continued calmly, "that my grandmother saw more clearly into our future than we could do ourselves, and we have only to congratulate ourselves, that an inclination, never very strong, — I mean," she added, replying to a negative gesture of her companion, "a regard not strong enough to withstand the force of circumstances, — a liking that could vanish before the will of a capricious old man, — should have been fettered by no engagement, and should have been allowed to fade out on both sides without the awkwardness of a formal rupture."

"And you will not tell me," he said, after a few moments' silence, "who has replaced me in your heart."

"Sir Alban," she said, with a quiet smile, "to-morrow will soon be here!"

CHAPTER VI.



It is come at last — the day for which she has thirsted with such a feverish hope. Now, nothing can step between her and her dearest wish. "Unless I die before night," Regina thinks, "nothing on earth can baffle me."

There is a tap at the door; she recognizes the sound of Lady Oswestry's flexible fingers, and goes to open herself.

"Good gracious! how lovely we look!" cried her ladyship starting back. Then, embracing Regina, she congratulated her on her coming of age.

"You will be quiet here," he said, "while I order the carriage. I leave Miss Howard in your kind care, duchess; fasten the door till I return; we want no condolences."

"We will talk it over by and by, when you are calmer," said the duchess, leaning tenderly over Regina.

Her hands were clasped over her face, her head bent down to her knees. If ever she felt *despair*, it was at that moment.

"What have I done? What have I done?" she repeated over and over.

"You have done the noblest, the most loving action in the world!" replied the duchess; "and you have failed, as brave men sometimes fail, who peril their heart's blood upon some great achievement. What then?"

"Oh, I have failed worse than that!" cried Regina, lifting up her pallid face. "Had it been life, I could say with you, 'What then?' But all the wrongs and injuries of so many years bequeathed to me to set to rights, and I to make one great mistake, — oh, not to be retrieved! His mortal foe, whom he shut out with so much care, fixed here forever by my fault — oh, what a fate is this!"

Her tears broke forth at last, — her wild, uncontrolled weeping.

"You have done your duty," returned the duchess in her soothing voice; "let the rest go! You deny yourself the splendid position offered to you, you bide your time, and, by an ingenious quibble, that one less patient and resolved would have overlooked, you restore the succession to the lawful heir; and to see his greatest foe, as you rightly call him, step in and grasp the gift, — there's something hidden in all this, some good we cannot fathom. You have a noble heart, — take courage; the fortune's gone, but wealth is not all you could bestow; he may be happy yet."

"I loved him! There, look down on me!" cried Regina, throwing wide her arms with a sudden gesture of despair.

"He won my heart; and then the fortune came, and he flung me off. His pride, you see — his pride! He never loved me, and I watched and waited to give it up, and thought, — oh, fool! no matter what I thought."

"Poor child! compose yourself, they are coming," said the duchess, opening the door.

"The carriage is ready, — to Piermont, I think," said Lord Oswestry, glancing at Regina.

"Better, I think," returned the duchess.

"No, Holmwood!" said Regina, trying to come forward, but she swayed round and fell powerless to the floor.

"To Holmwood, then," said the duchess, quickly; "I will go with her."

She did not quite lose her senses; she felt them lift her into the carriage, she was conscious of a sharp perfume, like aromatic vinegar, she knew that her head lay on the soft bosom of the duchess, and that Lady Oswestry's warm, gentle fingers were removing the hair from her temples; she heard the dull noise of the carriage, too, and felt something of an uneasy posture in the corner; then an aching wish for darkness and rest and for silence, unbroken even by the soft murmurs of her kind companions.

At last Holmwood is reached. The carriage sets down Regina and the duchess, and carries back Lady Oswestry; and Edith, tearful and wondering, receives her friend much in the same enfeebled condition as when she first claimed the shelter of the cottage. But she does not know that the gentle, lovely woman, who so kindly dismisses her to rest, and who takes her place with a mother's tenderness beside Regina's pillow, is no less a person than the celebrated Duchess of Clareville. So Regina lies, — the dim watchlight burning on the table, everything silent round her, — looking up into her friend's sweet face, until her heavy eyelids close, and she forgets her sorrows in sleep.

CHAPTER VII.



REGINA'S first impression on waking in the morning was a sense of relief that she could hardly explain to herself. She could not but allow that the re-appearance of Colonel Willingham was a painful and disappointing circumstance ; but the fact that the harassing connection with the estate of Beyminstre was forever closed,—there was a freedom in the thought which almost consoled her for the rest. She would not allow herself to feel for Alban,—she repeated again and again that it was worse than weakness to allow herself to think about him,—that the past *was* past, in the fullest sense of the term,—and that it was utterly impossible he should hold any place in her future.

The duchess was surprised when they met in the morning,—for she had gone to bed as soon as she had seen her young friend asleep,—to observe the calm and resolute expression of her countenance.

"You were most kind to bear with me, dear duchess," Regina said ; "but I shall give you no more trouble,—my weakness is past."

"I am glad of it, my love, if it make you happier ; but I am afraid that our weaknesses are so completely a part of ourselves, that we cannot feel quite comfortable without them."

Regina looked very brave, and began to make the breakfast.

"I should not much wonder if you were to receive a visit to-day," remarked the duchess.

"From whom ?" asked Regina, starting.

"From the disinherited knight,—Mr. Willingham, must I call him ?"

"Oh, no!" said Regina. "He knows too well what I think; we had a few words on the terrace that evening, after you had gone in."

"And I was hoping that those few words were of a conciliatory nature," said the duchess.

"No! I tell you truly, duchess, that I have worn out all those feelings, — or he has worn them out for me; women are not to endure everything, I suppose, without resentment; and, when time disposes them to forgive, I assure you very heartily, judging from my own impressions, it disposes them also to forget."

There was something a little doubting in the duchess's smile, especially as she traced a certain nervous eagerness in Regina's manner when there came a violent ring at the outer gate. It was evident that she did not quite disbelieve the possibility of a visit of more than common interest. Yet she looked relieved when Lord and Lady Oswestry were announced.

"You dear, deranged, lovable creature!" cried Lady Oswestry, embracing Regina. "What could possess you? What have you been dreaming about? It was very grand; yet I wish with all my heart that you had kept the property yourself. Now, tell me, how are you?"

"Very well, thanks to the kind care of the duchess," answered Regina; "and all the better for being freed of Beyminstre."

"What shall we do with her, duchess?" asked Lord Oswestry.

"I should like nothing better than to decide her future lot," replied her grace; "but this young lady, I suspect, is likely to act for herself on every occasion."

Regina blushed a little, for she could not help understanding the allusion to Lord Ellesdon.

"As for poor little Exmoor, I thought he never would have left off crying last night," said Lady Oswestry.

"But I have not heard yet how the young man bears his reverses," remarked the duchess.

"I had naturally some curiosity," said Lady Oswestry, "to learn what he thought of it all, and I asked him last night, if Miss Howard was not an angel? and, would you believe it, he said '*Yes!*' and not a word more; and I asked him, if he was not astonished to see the colonel? and he said '*Yes!*' again, and then went out of the room."

"Well, well," said Lord Oswestry, "considering that it was then two o'clock in the morning, I think a man might be excused for taking his candle and walking off to bed."

"The best thing he could do, I think," said Regina quickly.

"You see, Miss Howard, what it is to irritate a lawyer," remarked Lord Oswestry; "it seems that this Sir Ralph Willingham has been some time in this country, lurking about London."

"I'm glad his name is not Alban, however," exclaimed Regina, stopping short when it was too late, and blushing beautifully.

Lord Oswestry glanced across at the duchess, smiled slightly, and went on.

"His name is Ralph Alban Willingham, Miss Howard. He seems to have been aware that Mr. Reynard was an unscrupulous person, and so applied to him, in the first instance, to learn whether his brother's will did not leave some loophole for contesting your right to the estate. Your announcement, I suppose, opened Mr. Reynard's eyes to the step you were about to take; he, no doubt, thought the chance worth a journey down to Beyminstre; and there's a plain explanation of a very dramatic scene, which could not have been better timed if it had been rehearsed for a twelvemonth. Sir Ralph is at open warfare with his son, of course; his first order was to desire that he might never be admitted to the house; and, unfortunately, it now can never be his, since the entail is cut off, and Sir Ralph may leave it where he pleases. It

seems he has brought over with him a half-caste Peruvian woman, to whom he is much attached, and to whom it is said he is married; but that is doubtful. So much my man Edmonds picked up last night. Don't you think he was very industrious?"

The duchess saw Regina's hands clasped tightly together, with the effort to preserve her calmness, and answered for her, —

"We are much obliged to Mr. Edmonds; we all feel a little curious about this *Revenant*; I don't think there is an English word for a returned spirit. But do you think it is past all hope that the father and son may become reconciled?"

"Altogether," he replied. "Alban could never overlook Sir Ralph's treatment of his mother."

"But I hope," interposed Lady Oswestry, "I am not keeping away that silly little goose, Edith Carleton?"

"No; she is still an invalid, and does not come down to breakfast," said Regina.

"Has she overcome her *penchant* for that good-for-nothing Henry?"

"Oh, yes, Lady Oswestry; I believe so."

"He was wild to accompany us this morning, that he might throw himself *again* at your feet."

"Lady Oswestry!"

"He said he had never seen anything so beautiful as your countenance and manner when you renounced the estate! He declared he had rather win your hand than succeed to Beyminstre himself."

"My empty hand," said Regina, laughing.

"Not so empty," returned Lady Oswestry. "My dear, if at your age I had possessed twelve hundred a year, I should have been Lady Henry Montresor, living at Boulogne, I suppose, with two maids and a man."

They were going over the house, which her ladyship had desired to see, when she gave utterance to this little bit of candor.

"Happily, the fates interposed!" she added; "and now I see him as he really is, a man not worth the sacrifice of a single yard of ribbon,—a single string of beads! Not that I have any wish to influence your choice,—but you may tell little Carleton that."

"You may be sure I will impress it upon her," said Regina, laughing.

"On my word you have a very pretty garden!" pursued Lady Oswestry, strolling out of the glass door; "and there's a charming seat under the mulberry-tree! Rural felicity, my dear! I picture you and the curate seated here about sunset. He is fat, and therefore no doubt given to sighing."

"Pray, spare him, Lady Oswestry; he is an especial favorite of mine."

"I will, my dear; and the more readily as I observe him coming up the walk. I am glad to see that he takes off his hat like a gentleman."

Regina got up to meet him, and Lady Oswestry said, laughing: "I will leave you to your little flirtation,—the more readily as I detect a trifling show of coquetry in our excellent duchess toward my lord. He is gathering her strawberries, I observe. I don't see why I should not have some, too."

And, returning Mr. Brand's salutation, she went laughing off to the other side of the garden.

"Well, Miss Howard, it has been a disappointment," he said, beginning at once with what they were both thinking about; "but you have the rare satisfaction of having done your best."

"I do believe," she remarked, "that if there chances to be one person, more than another, whose death seems desirable to all parties, and whose existence is productive of very serious inconvenience, that person is sure to live forever."

"Showing, I think, Miss Howard, how subordinate these vexations and contradictions, serious though they appear to us, are held by Infinite Wisdom to the education they are intended to bestow on the soul of man."

"I wish at this moment, Mr. Brand, I were a Catholic!"

"May I ask why, Miss Howard?"

"Only that, as I acted from mixed motives in this affair,—and one *angry* motive I confess,—I should pick up some consolation from a confessor respecting my failure; now as things are I failed gratis!"

"You know how to make me laugh, Miss Howard; but—seriously, will you tell me what motive you had, that you disapprove on reflection, and I will try if I can extract some comfort for you."

"Well, then, I must tell you in confidence," she paused, and looked mischievous, "that I am very much afraid of ghosts; and, if Sir Herbert were to haunt me, what should I do?"

"Now, Miss Howard, you are not serious."

"I am, indeed! Poor man! he looked like a ghost when he was alive, and what he can look like now,—I assure you a white window-curtain last night, gave me very serious misgivings!"

"You are quite as bad as ever, Miss Howard."

"And you are good as ever, Mr. Brand," said Regina, quite affectionately; "you don't take offence at my nonsense. Now, tell me something about Winny Hopper,—something amusing."

"And tell me, too," cried Lady Oswestry, coming up at the moment; "I am very much interested about Miss Hopper."

"I have no news to give your ladyship from that quarter except that a relation of yours has been lately very assiduous in his visits there," replied Mr Brand.

"Could you believe it of Henry!" exclaimed Lady Oswestry; "what *can* be his motive? Do people think, Mr. Brand, that he is paying his addresses to that wonderful female?"

"People—that is the village people—undoubtedly *do* think so!" replied Mr. Brand; "but I will confess to your

ladyship that I do not share in their belief only, when a gentleman is a daily visitor at the home of a single lady, — when he is seen walking out with her, — when he goes with her to church” —

“The carriage is waiting,” said Lord Oswestry, coming up with the duchess, “and we have a long drive before us.”

“How I dislike to see you all go away!” cried Regina, looking round on her friends.

“We only follow your example, Miss Howard, in going away,” said Lord Oswestry; “however, before we start, perhaps you will fix the day for your coming to Piermont.”

“Remember that Ellesdon Castle comes first,” said the duchess, taking her hand: “it is just in your road from Keswick, and I shall try to persuade Lord and Lady Oswestry to meet you there.”

“That will be pleasant,” cried Regina; “but I have done with looking forward. I *hope* I shall go to Ellesdon, and I *hope* I shall go on to Piermont; but everything seems uncertain to me *now*.”

They were walking down the garden, and Regina found herself next to Lord Oswestry.

“I have hardly had time to say a word to you, Miss Howard,” he said: “I trust you will not let this unlucky business weigh on your spirits. For my cousin, you know, he is only where he was before.”

“Oh, yes! for him; but I cannot help thinking of Sir Herbert; and there’s something awful to me in the prosperity of a wicked man like Sir Ralph.”

“After all, you see, Miss Howard, there are better things in this world even than houses and lands.”

“Yes; for women, but not for men, Lord Oswestry.”

“I am sure, Miss Howard, that is not Alban’s way of thinking.”

“Pardon me, Lord Oswestry, I believe he sets more than a common value upon them. I was formerly a little acquainted

ed with him, during his mother's life, and I speak '*avec connaissance de cause.*' But I own to you, I don't mean to mourn because Sir Alban is not enriched; I did what I could to satisfy him, because I thought it just: he had better now conciliate his father, and see if he can get the property that way."

"Shall I tell him that is your opinion?"

"By no means as coming from me. I have no wish to send a message to Mr. Willingham."

"You would not object to meeting him?"

"Not at all more now than before; but when I visit Piermont, he will have left the country, I suppose."

"It is clear, Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, smiling, "that you will manage your own affairs without my help."

That brief smile, gone in an instant, always brought Alban to her mind. Something now touched her more than usual; her color rose, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I hope I have said nothing to hurt you," he added.

"Don't look at me," she said quickly, in her wayward manner.

"And you have nothing to say to any one at Piermont?"

"Yes; my love to dear little Exmoor. Farewell!"

She stood at the gate, with Mr. Brand, to see her friends off. Lady Oswestry leaned from the window, and directed her arch eyes, full of mischief, toward Regina and her companion, and shook her head in mock reproach.

"And now we are to lose *you*, Miss Howard," said Mr. Brand; "when are we to expect you at Holmwood again?"

"When I have paid all these grand visits, — unless Miss Carleton should require a milder air for the winter. Ah! it is not the *poor* alone who want care and kindness."

"Why, you *are* losing no time! Here is your brougham coming round. What a pretty carriage!"

"Is it not? Lord Oswestry chose it. And here is Edith,

ready dressed. I wish she may enjoy our excursion half as much as I mean to do."

Edith was coming downstairs with a cautious air, as if not sure that the guests were gone. She looked very pallid, but stronger than when Regina had seen her last, and there was about her whole air that stillness and composure which gave to her beauty the charm it wanted in her happier days,—the dignity of sorrow.

"Come down, Edith, you are not afraid of Mr. Brand!" called Regina.

And with a little smile, a little blush, that became her infinitely, Edith hastened forward and greeted Mr. Brand.

"There will be a class ready for you when you come back, Miss Carleton," he said, as he handed her into the carriage.

"Don't take it, Edith!" cried Regina; "for if you do, a dear lady I know will scratch your eyes out."

"I will protect Miss Carleton's eyes," said Mr. Brand, smiling.

"Then I'll have half her class; we will raise a mutiny in Miss Hopper's camp!" cried Regina; and the brougham whirled from the door, so that Mr. Brand's remonstrance was inaudible.

He was still standing before the house, though the very dust raised by the carriage wheels had long settled on the ground, when a gentleman, whose face he thought he ought to recollect, rode up at full gallop, and rang violently at the gate.

As he inquired eagerly whether Miss Howard was visible, Mr. Brand thought it only civil to come forward and mention that Miss Howard had just driven from the house, on her way to the lakes.

"I am much obliged to you," said the stranger. "Mr. Brand I believe? My name is Alban Willingham."

CHAPTER VIII.



H, Edith ! look ! — how beautiful !” cried Regina, leaning from the carriage.

They were travelling from Penrith toward Ullswater, and the lovely Eamont, tumbling and foaming, glanced here and there through the trees on the left of their route.

“I’m so glad Mr. Brand advised us to take this way,” continued Regina ; “we get the first hint of mountains at Penrith, and so come by degrees upon all the wonders of this fairy land. Dear me ! what a hill ! had we not better get out ?”

The coachman, already very cross at the risks her new brougham was running, strongly advised the ladies to walk up the hill, which he stigmatized as *heathenish*, and the two friends were soon toiling against the steep ascent.

“I hope it will do no harm !” exclaimed Regina, as soon as they stood again on level ground ; “I ought to have thought of that before.”

“Oh, no !” replied Edith, putting back the bright disordered ringlets from her glowing face, “Mr. Brand so strongly recommended me to walk, that I went out twice every day at Holmwood ; and I am not tired at all.”

“I never before wished the sun not to shine,” said Regina ; “but this *is* heat !”

“Oh ! look at that hillside, against which the sheep are feeding to the very top. Did you ever see anything so abrupt ? the little stone walls look almost horizontal,” cried Edith.

“And is this Patterdale ? are we to stop here, Dixon ?” asked Regina of the cross coachman. “What a tiny inn !

But come, Edith! everywhere you find eggs and ham — be hungry, please!”

“I am; but let us first look at the head of the lake. How curious! the river on that side the bridge, and Ullswater on this.”

Their early dinner was soon despatched, and they were on their road along the lovely shores of Ullswater.

“Don’t you long, every minute, to get out and take a sketch?” cried Regina, as she watched the many-tinted mountains changing their outlines at every turn of the road.

“Only it would be so hopeless,” said Edith.

“True!” sighed Regina.

“I wish, Miss Howard, I had half your strength,” remarked Edith, after a pause.

“I wish you had, Miss Carleton,” rejoined Regina, laughing; “we would take such interminable walks together”

“I meant strength of mind!” suggested Edith. “I can’t help thinking how you have thrown off this disappointment just after the first; and how I have suffered mine to prey upon me, and half wear me out; and even now I feel a sinking at the heart that never leaves me quite, as if all was over for me in this world.”

“My dear Edith, in the first place, I trust that all is just beginning for you; and secondly, allow me to hint that there are many kinds of disappointment. I am free of that abominable place, which certainly, in my life, I shall never set eyes on again; and therefore, I can very well make up my mind to have got rid of it in a manner that I did not anticipate: after all, I am better pleased now, that Colonel Willingham has come to life. I think Mr. Willingham was very unfit to have Beyminstre.”

“Dear me! why?” cried Edith.

“Because his whole life and soul were wrapped up in the place, and people who are worth anything seldom succeed in

their dearest wishes; we have Scripture warrant for that."

"Poor Mr. Willingham!" said Edith, after a short pause.

"Poor in what, I wonder?" replied her companion. "Not poor in spirit, nor so very poor in pocket; for I know he has six hundred a year from his mother, unless he has made away with it, besides his pay, and Lord Oswestry has just obtained for him a capital post in India. Other people with half his means have families to bring up, — clergymen, for instance."

"Yes, — Mr. Brand has only two hundred a year," remarked Edith, pensively.

"There is only one thing that I regretted to surrender with that horrid Beyminstre," said Regina, "and that is the living; such a good one, Edith — worth about a thousand a year. I would have given it to Mr. Brand. And now Sir Ralph will sell it to some creature like himself, I dare say; and it will profit nobody."

Edith's glowing face was turned toward her friend. "You would? How kind! how like you! and Mr. Brand is such a good man! I think he admires you very much."

"I hope he does, because I admire him," laughed Regina, "and it is such a comfort, Edith, to get a little plain admiration, which you know by old experience is not likely to become inconveniently strong."

Edith looked very much delighted at this statement.

"To be sure," continued Regina, "he is not handsome, that dear Mr. Brand."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Edith, eagerly, and added in a low tone, "I should never think well of a handsome man again."

"Why, that is rather a sweeping clause!" laughed Regina. "I confess I have a slight prejudice in favor of good looks. How frightful all the bad people have been whom I have happened to know! What can be uglier, than that gaunt, sallow, smirking Winny Hopper? and Mr. Morley's

hungry face? — Mr. Reynard, again, who certainly might sit for Judas Iscariot with great applause."

Edith laughed.

"And, on the contrary, I have always met with kindness from good-looking people. What a pleasing face has dear old Mr. Winter! and the beautiful duchess, she was kind to me from the first day we met; and I am sure I can never feel grateful enough to Lord and Lady Oswestry for their cordial, friendly hospitality."

"Don't you think Lord Oswestry is very like his cousin, Mr. Willingham?" asked Edith.

"There is some resemblance," answered Regina, turning to look out of the window. "Why, Edith, I could be certain that carriage coming to meet us is the Duke of Clareville's. How pleased I shall be to get a peep of the lovely duchess! Stop, coachman!"

"How very nice to meet in this way!" cried the duchess, whose carriage drew up at the same moment with that of Miss Howard. "Ellesdon was just wondering whether you were at Keswick."

"Is Lord Ellesdon still in England?" asked Regina.

"Here, Miss Howard," he replied, leaning across his mother.

"Have you been to the Airy Force?" asked the duchess.

"What is this Airy Force?" inquired Regina.

"The loveliest waterfall. I thought, meeting you so near, you had been exploring."

"And I — who have never seen a waterfall," cried Regina. "Let me out, Richard. I hope, Edith, you have strength left for this."

"We will all go," said the duchess; "I never like to pass the hunting lodge without paying it a visit."

Lord Ellesdon handed out Regina, and they set off across the fields to the beautiful ravine, where the slender shaft of water falls seventy feet into a rocky basin, shadowed with

trees. Half-way down there is a narrow wooden bridge; upon which the party stood, admiring the diamond clearness of the pool beneath, the dazzling spray, the newest greenness of the moss, the vapory freshness of the atmosphere, the ever-changing column falling so near.

"You will see nothing like this in Egypt," said Regina, as Lord Ellesdon handed her across the plank, when they at length moved to descend the narrow path that led to the foot of the cascade.

"If I thought I should see anything I had been used to see, I would not go there," he replied.

"Take care of Miss Howard," called the duchess, a little lower down; "I will be Miss Carleton's cicerone."

"It's a bad path, always slippery. Do you want to go down?" asked Lord Ellesdon.

"Very much," said Regina; "I'm not afraid."

"Give me your hand; don't be in a hurry. I say, Miss Howard, I wish you were going with me."

"Why, so I am," answered Regina, thinking only of the waterfall, and carefully advancing her slender foot to a fragment of a rock just beneath where she stood.

"I mean to Egypt," said Lord Ellesdon, looking earnestly in her face.

"That's nonsense!" she returned; and she felt that a more inconvenient place for a declaration could not have been chosen, since, if she had rejected his support at that moment, she must have slipped into the pool, so that in one sense it was impossible to refuse his hand.

"My mother said you would not listen to me!" he exclaimed.

"She might say, with truth, that I could hardly hear you," laughed Regina, pointing to the cascade, whose rushing sound almost drowned their voices.

"You don't care to hear me," he retorted.

"You seem to think that *Le sage entend à demi mot!*" said Regina, still descending.

• "Will you allow me to call on you at Keswick?"

"Really, I don't think it is quite proper for single women to receive visits from young noblemen."

"I wonder how long you will remain a single woman?"

"Always!"

"I cannot believe any woman of sense and feeling would make or keep a resolution to forego all the duties and blessings of her sex. It is very well while you are young; but, just be good enough to think over the old maids of your acquaintance. The best, useless and ridiculous, — the worst, absolutely rabid with ill-nature."

"St. Paul thought otherwise, but no doubt you know best," said Regina, meekly; but, while she spoke, a keen recollection of her old friend Winny made her blush and laugh.

"I wish you would be in earnest," pleaded her companion.

"I am very much so," she replied. "If you wish for plain speaking, allow me to say that I look on your censure as very illiberal, and barely polite, since it is only a question of a few years more or less, whether I am included in your category or not."

"As if it were possible to imagine that you would adhere to such a resolution. It only remains to be proved whether I, or some more fortunate person, shall be able to persuade you to change your mind."

"Look at Edith Carleton, hanging over the brink of the pool. Would she not make a good picture of Sabrina, 'with her amber-dropping hair?'"

"I cannot fancy Sabrina in a gauze bonnet."

"No; your mind turns to a different style of costume. You are hesitating between a turban and a felt hat; or, perhaps, you mean to shave your head and wear a fez, like Miss Martineau."

"I hate the very name of Miss Martineau."

"To be sure, it's a crime to be single; I forgot that."

"I could apply to her Thackeray's description of another

single lady, in his matchless *Vanity Fair*,—"a godless old woman without a wig!"

"Well, I never argued that a single woman should be godless; rather the contrary; and I might suggest that, if you judge by that lady's last work, she is willing to accept not only one God, but any number you please."

"Now, Miss Howard, to come back to the case in point, shall I have the honor of waiting upon you when I return from Egypt?"

"If you are accompanied by a dark-eyed Lady Ellesdon, seventeenth daughter of Ibrahim Pacha."

"I do wish you would not laugh."

"Do you smoke, Lord Ellesdon?"

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"*Raison de plus* for the alliance which I have delicately suggested. Ibrahim Pacha is a great man, and has a great many daughters, and they *all* smoke; and, to tell you a secret which should be worth a great deal to you, English women (though they pretend otherwise when they are on their promotion) detest tobacco most cordially.

"You would make a saint swear, Miss Howard!"

"I hope not! Of course you know that you ask a Mahomedan after 'his house.' You are not so vulgar as to inquire after his 'daughters;' and I believe an alliance in that rank is rather expensive for the gentleman; but, to do you justice, you are not mercenary."

"You continue to fascinate one, even when you are most provoking," said Lord Ellesdon.

"What is the matter with you two?" asked the duchess as they joined her; "are you quarrelling?"

"Desperately!" said Regina.

"I could not quarrel with Miss Howard," remarked Lord Ellesdon.

"You must part friends," said the duchess; "he goes away next week."

"Ah! you will bear in mind my little suggestions about the pacha's daughter?"

"I shall bear *you* in mind only too much, Miss Howard."

"Adieu!" said the duchess; "I shall very soon find my way over to Keswick."

"I think," said Edith, after a long silence, "that Lord Ellesdon looked very disconsolate when he said good-by to you."

"Really!" said Regina, laughing.

"You always laugh at those things," remarked Edith.

"I laugh, in this case, because I am glad; it is a comfortable reflection to me that there are some people who are disconsolate, as you term it, for exactly ten minutes, if you are not sensible of the honor they intend you; and such a person is that very pleasant, well-behaved man from whom we have just parted."

"A good many people are in love with you," sighed Edith.

"Not a good many, my dear; the list is a very small one. We will begin with Lord Ellesdon, — if you can, by the aid of a very strong magnifier, suppose that the liking he feels deserves the name of love! Certainly it is not mercenary, for I have not now fortune enough to tempt a man in his position; but, you may depend on it, I shall hear no word more of the six or eight pretenders to Beyminstre, who used to annoy me. On my word, I ought to think more gratefully of Lord Ellesdon; for he stands alone! If I live to be old, I shall look back and say, I did once have one lover who paid attention to me and not to Beyminstre."

"I do not think he stands quite alone in his feelings," said Edith, with some hesitation.

"My dear Edith; surely you cannot think that Lord Henry?" —

"No! not Lord Henry," replied Edith; "though at times his manner to you has given me more pain than I can ex-

press ; but though I was so deeply engrossed by my own folly at that time yet I saw — I could not help suspecting ” —

Regina felt her cheeks glow. Surely Edith was not foolish enough to imagine, as Alban had done, that Lord Oswestry had too warm a regard for her. She hardly liked to ask her to go on.

“ One person,” Edith continued, “ who watched you so incessantly, and listened to all you said, and looked so restless when others were paying you attention — though, somehow or other, he hardly ever spoke to you.”

“ Why, who do you mean ? ” asked Regina, turning quickly to her.

“ Sir Alban Willingham ! ”

“ I thought so ! He ! Yes — he listened, and pried and wandered about me ; not because he cared one straw what my lot in life was to be, but just from curiosity to see who was likely to possess his darling Beyminstre. That man’s infatuated idolatry for that place should be a warning to all Christian people ! I declare I felt in a bad dream whenever he was near me. Let us never mention the place or the man any more. I could thank Heaven, on my knees, that all that wretched time is past ! ”

Edith opened her blue eyes in astonishment at her friend’s vehemence, but she very readily promised not to allude any more to the forbidden topic ; and so, as people do when there is something they must not talk about, she sat thinking of Alban, and trying with all her might to find something else to say.

“ Do you know, Edith, what I am thinking of ? ” asked Regina, after a pause.

“ Of Bey — oh ! I forgot ! ”

Regina laughed merrily. “ No, not exactly ; but I don’t wonder you can’t get it out of your head after my absurd tirade. Pray, dear Edith, don’t feel there is a subject you must not approach, or we should never get on well together.

I was wondering what we should find Mrs. Shirley like ; for, after all, I was not able to meet her in town. She must be nice, or the duchess would not have recommended her."

"We shall soon see," replied Edith ; "there, beneath us, lies the town of Keswick."

"And great Skiddaw behind. That must be one of our first excursions, Edith. Now our home is on this side of Keswick, half-way up the hill. The name is Eglantine Villa. I don't like the name, but I could live in any sort of house for the sake of such a view."

A few more minutes, and the carriage drew up before a picturesque summer residence, with a veranda garlanded with roses and clematis, which opened in a velvet lawn that sloped down to the road. In the veranda stood an elderly lady, short and rather stout, with smooth, gray hair, and a comely, motherly face. She came to the carriage-door with outstretched hands, partly in welcome, partly to help out the travellers.

"I have the pleasure of speaking to Mrs. Shirley?" inquired Regina.

"Yes, my dear! Dear me, what a young thing she is to be alone in the world! And Miss Carleton, poor love! But I'm very glad you are safe arrived: it is getting dark, and the dew is very heavy. This way, my dears; tea is ready, and a bit of fire lit; and when did you leave my kind friend the Duchess of Clareville?"

"We met her on the road, not very far from here," said Regina.

"Well, to be sure; how very singular! My dear, is your tea sweet enough? And here's a footstool for Miss Carleton. Does she cough at all, poor thing?"

"Not much, Mrs. Shirley; but we mean both to grow strong in this beautiful country. I think we shall be out all day while this bright weather lasts."

"Only, my dear, I hope you will be prudent; don't over-walk yourselves; this is a very hilly country."

"We can hire ponies, I dare say, Mrs. Shirley, for climbing the hills?"

"Plenty, my dear; but I don't know whether they are quite steady. I should think a car would be better. A little more tongue? a bit of chicken? No! dear heart; you eat nothing after your journey."

"I can do nothing but look at the view," said Regina, going to the window. "This is the Derwent water, but what silver streak is that I see yonder?"

"Oh, that's Bassenthwaite — beyond Crosssthaite Church."

"Is that where Southey is buried?"

"Southey, my dear? I dare say he may be. He wrote some poetry, I think. It's a very pretty church."

"Decidedly," thought Regina, "she's a very nice old lady, but not literary. We could walk there, I think, Edith; it looks quite close."

And now the moon is on the lake, and the tea is cleared away. Edith is resting on the sofa, and Regina gazes, with her soul in her eyes, at the glorious panorama that extends on every side. Mrs. Shirley's knitting-needles click cheerfully.

"By the way, Mrs. Shirley," said Regina, carelessly, "there can hardly be any letters for me yet?"

"Yes, my dear, there *are* — *two*!" said Mrs. Shirley, impressively; "but I thought I'd wait till you asked for candles; it was hardly light when you first came in."

A blush came over her face, she trembled with anxiety. She had half expected that Alban would have called before she left Holmwood. The duchess thought so as well; but, no doubt, he felt a meeting would be awkward; he had preferred writing. Such an event as her resignation could hardly be passed over without some comment. As a gentle-

man, he must say something. She could not wait; she must have her letters at once.

"If you would kindly order candles," she said, trying to steady her voice, "I should like to read them now. I'm rather eager about letters."

"Yes, my dear, to be sure," said Mrs. Shirley; and she stuck her knitting-pins through her ball of lamb's wool, and laid her work slowly down; then she rang for candles, and then with a cedar alumet she carefully lit a taper, and went into the next room. Edith, roused by the light, sat up blinking her eyes.

"Here they are, my love!" said Mrs. Shirley.

Regina, standing at the table, tore open the first. It was a printed paper from "Everest, draper and hosier; woollen goods and fancy plaids of every description." She flung it down, and seized the other, which was in a handsome envelope, carefully sealed.

"Mr Tupman, butcher, George street, respectfully solicits the *honor* of Miss Howard's esteemed favors."

"And are these all?" cried Regina, tearing the harmless note in half, and crushing the pieces in her hand.

"Yes, my dear, those two; and as I thought they were something of that kind, I have not settled to deal any where, but just paid as I went, and ordered in a" —

"Dear Mrs. Shirley, excuse me!" broke in Regina, whose patience would hold out no longer; "we are both so tired, that we will go to bed at once."

CHAPTER IX.



FOR the next week Regina felt a complete *embarras de richesses*, — there were so many places she wished to see while the fine weather lasted ; and this year the fine weather was particularly complaisant. The near neighborhood of Keswick is so fraught with beauties that the friends had not yet made up their mind to spend a whole day away from their favorite haunts. To row on the lake, morning and evening, to wander beside the lovely Greta, or among the wooded hills that rise straight from the shores of the Derwent water had so engrossed them hitherto that they were quite surprised to find so many days had slipped away and they had not yet ascended Skiddaw, nor visited Buttermere, nor seen Borrowdale, nor even driven to the nearer Bassenthwaite.

"What shall we do first, Edith?" asked Regina one delightful morning, as they stood together on the lawn, watching the mist gradually clearing off from the mountain tops.

"They say it's not clear enough for Skiddaw," said Edith; "and I am half afraid of those black ponies, they look so spiteful."

"I wonder what lies out between those mountains," said Regina, pointing across the lake; "those gray and pink shadows tempt me strangely. Do you know, Dixon?"

"La, ma'am! there aint nothing — not yonder," replied Dixon, who was never sparing of his negatives.

"Dixon believes in a vacuum," laughed Regina, turning to Edith; "he also believes that those desperate-looking hills will scratch all the remaining varnish off his brougham."

Dixon, who was sweeping the newly-mown grass off the lawn, admitted that he didn't see no use in going to the first house in London to have a carriage built, and then to

knock it to pieces over roads which he supposed had been made about the time of Noah's ark, "when nobody didn't know no better."

"So that we will take a car for the day if you will bespeak one with a careful driver, Dixon," remarked Regina; "and find out, if you can, what part of the country it is called out there?"

"What makes you so merry, my dears?" asked Mrs. Shirley, as the two girls came in, laughing, through the glass doors to breakfast.

"We are going to explore the interior of this unknown country, Mrs. Shirley," said Regina; "will you come with us to Buttermere?"

"No, thank you, my dear; it's a bitter cold bleak place, is Buttermere! I'm sure the very sight of those dark, steep mountains is enough to make any one feel rheumatic; and I only hope, my dears, you have plenty of warm shawls."

"This lovely morning, Mrs. Shirley?"

"Ah! you never know in these parts what weather you will have for an hour together; and, as to your luncheon, I am thinking"—

"Don't think, Mrs. Shirley. We will take whatever the inn affords when we put up at Buttermere. The driver must be fed, and we will have luncheon at the same time."

About the shawls it must be allowed that the young ladies were a little obstinate. The morning was so bright and warm that Regina thought she made a great concession in wearing a small cashmere, and Edith declared she was almost stifled beneath her thin *barège* scarf.

Nothing could be more successful than the expedition to Buttermere. The wild, lonely journey, the beautiful road along the Crummock water, and the frowning grandeur of the mountains that wall in the little, gloomy lake of Buttermere, kept the two friends in a constant fever of delight. The day was so brilliant that every lovely spot was seen to

the greatest advantage. They wandered about until they were fairly exhausted, and then proceeded to the little inn, and modestly asked for something to eat.

The motherly hostess showed them into a small room, and hastened to set before them what she evidently considered a delicate meal; namely, some very sour cheese, a jug of thin beer, and that extraordinary composition called oatcake, which tastes to southern palates like a mixture of sand and soap.

"I am so sorry on your account, Edith," said Regina, when they were alone. "I wish we had brought something eatable with us."

"Oh, don't think of me. This lovely scenery has been my feast, — besides, we shall eat the better dinner."

"But, look!" cried Regina, suddenly; "how black the sky has become. I hope, after all, we are not going to have rain."

"The car is ready," said Edith, going to the window; "perhaps we had better start at once."

The weather certainly began to threaten; the dark mountains round the lake looked bleak and ominous.

"We shall have a storm for certain," said the driver, as the ladies came out, and two or three great drops fell plashing down as he spoke.

"Could not we stay the night here?" inquired Regina, looking with anxiety at Edith's delicate form.

No; all the rooms were occupied. There was a whole family staying at the little inn; and two gentlemen had sent from Shap to secure the two last beds she had in the world.

"Don't mind me," whispered Edith; "a storm among the mountains will be well worth a drenching."

"To me — not to you," said Regina, taking her seat in the car; "and not even a cloak, — not so much as a spare shawl!"

"Here's something to shelter ye!" cried the mistress,

throwing an old horsecloth after them into the car; "t' driver can bring it back when a coom this way again."

The landlady knew better than they did what was before them. They spread the cloth over their knees, rather reluctantly, for it was by no means redolent of Arabian perfumes, and began slowly to ascend the mountain.

The wind sang and whistled, then screamed among the rocks; the rain flashed and wreathed around them, or drove in slanting sheets steadily against the mountain-side, rebounding like hail-drops from the black crags. The carman led his horse zigzag up the steep ascent, and at a sharp angle of the road he stopped, and begged the ladies to get to the bottom of the car, for he was half afraid the wind would blow it over the mountain side. And there he stood, till the blast, yelling like a vexed multitude of demons, should subside a little.

The bottom of the car was three or four inches deep in water, which rendered it not altogether desirable as a seat; but they crouched down,—Regina covering Edith with the old rug, very much to her discomfort. Her bonnet came off, she lost her comb; and the weight of the rug pulled down her long light hair.

The thick rain, the shifting mist, the black mountain, the deep ravines, and the glimpses of Crummock water through the great ledges of rock,—the air filled with a mighty tumult of sounds, unknown except in mountain districts, all raised Regina's spirits to the utmost.

"If you were but a little better clothed, Edith, I should call this very amusing," she remarked. "Oh, what a howl! I thought we should have been blown across the ravine in good earnest then."

"What's the matter, my good fellow? Cannot you make head against the storm?" asked a voice that seemed familiar to Regina.

She looked up, and saw Lord Henry and Sir Alban standing close to the horse's head.

Edith, with a low cry, sank closer into the blanket.

"T' ladies be frightened, sir!" said the driver.

"I wish we could be of any service to the ladies," he returned, coming forward and raising his dripping felt hat.

"I'm not frightened, Lord Henry," said Regina, looking out of her retreat; "but I'm more uncomfortable than I ever was in my life; the water in here is a foot deep." And she laughed, while he could not help joining her. Then, turning to Sir Alban, he said something hastily, to which his friend seemed to make a negative reply, and remained in the middle of the road leaning on his stick.

"Shall I open the door? perhaps it will run out," he suggested, turning the handle.

"No, but it wont! You step down into these carts like a well. Only beg the driver to go on; and, if the horse *could* run away to Keswick, we should be much obliged to it."

"I should really be glad to escort you, Miss Howard, if you would give us leave," said Lord Henry; "we might just as well walk on to Keswick as go to the other place, — what's it's name? Buttermere? — and it is hardly safe for two ladies to be out in such a storm."

"Many thanks!" laughed Regina. "I can inform you that Keswick is three times as far off as Buttermere; and, as the sunshine of your presence would be strictly allegorical, you would be no protection against our only danger, — that of getting wet through."

"You are staying at Keswick, then?"

"Yes; that is, if we ever find ourselves there again; perhaps you would give the horse a poke with your stick. Thank you very much. Good-by!"

The horse scrambled off, — the corner was turned, — they were between two huge hills that almost shut out the obscured light, and they went on, fast or slow, as they best

might. They did not speak to each other until they were going through the main street of Keswick. Regina was thinking of Alban, — of his silent, distant manner, — only raising his hat to her just as they were parting company; at last she broke silence, —

“Edith!”

Edith lifted up her face, all stained with tears, from the bottom of the car. She was shivering like an aspen.

“Oh, that’s enough! If you mean to forgive the man, and be friends again, after all — *do!* I don’t! I am not so easily conciliated; for I suppose that is the reason why they have come prying into Cumberland. They could have got mountains enough in Scotland, and rain too, for that matter; though of course I am speaking of Lord Henry all this time; for the other, I know what brings *him!* He is come to look after his amiable widow, who has some property in the neighborhood.”

“You don’t believe he is here on purpose, Regina?” said Edith.

“It is rather a strange coincidence, if he is not,” said Regina.

“I have no pleasure in seeing him,” cried Edith; “I never wish to find myself in his presence again. If he comes, Regina, will you deny him the house?”

“In earnest, Edith?”

“Yes, — from my heart. I feel humiliated that he made me such a dupe; and I know better, now, what people ought to be.”

The last words were hardly audible. The car by this time had stopped before the door, and Mrs. Shirley awaited them with much condolence and plenty of hot tea and warm garments within.

Regina, wrapped in her shepherd’s plaid, was walking up the main street of Keswick the next morning, when she encountered Lord Henry and Sir Alban, just coming out of the principal inn.

She bowed as slightly as possible, in answer to Sir Alban's salutation. Lord Henry walked on by her side.

"I hope," he said, hesitating, "that your friend is not the worse for"—

"Yes; she caught a severe cold, and I'm quite uneasy about her," said Regina, quickly.

"Have you any medical adviser upon whom you can rely?" asked Lord Henry, looking very anxious.

"None!" she replied. "I have no idea who to send for; and, unless my friend gets better, I must write to Holmwood for my old friend, Mr. R——. And now," she thought, "I hope I have made him uncomfortable!"

"You will allow me, I hope, to call and inquire how you both are to-morrow?"

"It will be very kind in you to take so much trouble (for nothing)," she added, under her breath.

"And whither are you bound?" he asked.

"I am wandering about, in the hope of finding a shop where I may buy a comb; Miss Carleton lost hers yesterday."

"You don't mean to say that it was blown away?"

"It came out in the struggle with the wind and rain,—I can hardly tell how. Will this do? No; I am sure they sell nothing in Keswick but lead pencils."

"That is *my* object at present; we are going to the pencil manufactory."

"Then I can direct you; that is your turning."

She bowed with a slight, graceful inclination, that took in both gentlemen, and pursued her way.

She was just leaving the shop, where she had at last succeeded in her purchase, when a pretty, low carriage, drawn by two ponies, came slowly up the hill, driven by a groom, beside whom sat an upright lady, dressed in handsome new deep mourning. It was Winny Hopper.

"Regina!" exclaimed that lady; "is it really you? Staying here—and alone? No, with Miss Carleton? Edith

quite well? Very poorly—I don't wonder at that! Lady Oswestry quite well? And dear little Clara and Violet?"

"I wish Lady Violet could hear you!" thought Regina, while she civilly answered Miss Hopper's inquiries.

"Not heard of my loss? poor dear mamma; not seen it in the papers? Taking a little tour to divert my mind after the sad event. I am staying at the Queen's Head,—and you?"

"I have taken a house at the side of the hill, beyond the town, where I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you when Miss Carleton is a little better," said Regina.

"I might, perhaps, be useful in nursing dear Edith," said Winny; "although she has been weak and sinful, we should not be too severe"—

"Thank you, Miss Hopper; we have a most kind and excellent nurse in Mrs. Shirley, the lady who resides with me; and allow me to hint, that if Miss Carleton had been sinful, in your sense of the word, she would not be my friend and associate; although I would have done, I hope, everything in my power to reclaim her."

"Well! we will hope," said Winny, reluctantly; "by the by, have you seen anything of Lord Henry lately?"

"I parted from him about five minutes ago," said Regina, indifferently.

"Naughty Lord Henry! he told me he was going to the Lakes!" cried Winny, her face puckered with delight.

"Told *her*—how very odd!" thought Regina.

"And that was one inducement to me to come here," said Winny. "It is a charming country, and he could drive me about, you know. Nice little carriage, isn't it? Did he go this way? I shall pay you a visit very soon."

The carriage whirled away, and Regina walked home.

"O Mrs. Shirley! how is Edith?"

Miss Carleton was no better; and when the two gentlemen called, later in the day, the answer was that Miss Howard was in attendance on her friend, and could see no visitors.

CHAPTER X.



HERE is a walk well known to tourists along the side of the Derwent lake, which runs parallel with the road for some time, and then extends into the water, and terminates suddenly. Thickets of trees meet overhead, and the little promontory at the end is completely overarched; a seat is placed there, and the lapping of the tiny waves against the stones and roots that hang into the lake, is the only sound that mingles with the songs of birds, and the stir of the branches.

Regina had been for several days in close attendance upon Edith Carleton, who was suffering from a severe inflammatory cold; and Mrs. Shirley at last persuaded her to take advantage of the fresh summer morning, and spend an hour or two in her favorite retreat. She was in very dejected spirits. The doctor, whom they had been obliged to call in, thought very unfavorably of Miss Carleton. He could only account for the state of weakness to which she was reduced, by supposing that there had been some great strain upon her powers, either of body or mind. He spoke very doubtfully of her chances of ultimate recovery. Regina, who had a real affection for Edith, was extremely indignant with Lord Henry. She told Mrs. Shirley she should always look on him as a murderer, — much to that lady's horror. In this frame of mind she was not very much disposed to enjoy his society; but as she passed the landing-place, where the flat-boats are drawn up, each by its plank, she paused a moment to gaze on the ever-changing shadows upon the hills, and at the same time Lord Henry, who was standing with a waterman in one of the boats, looking over some fishing-tackle, sprang out on the shore and came to meet her.

"I thought you had left Keswick," she remarked civilly;

for when she was very angry, up to a certain point, she was always civil.

"Willingham has gone for a few days, on business, to Durham," he replied; "and, as I am all alone, I came down here to see the floating island."

"Oh! has that appeared again?"

"Yes; wont you row out to it?"

"I think not; I have very little curiosity."

"What a beautiful spot this is for summer!" said Lord Henry, after a moment's pause.

"Yes; but do you know I am quite looking forward to winter, — these mountains, all snow-covered, and the lake frozen across. I shall fancy myself in Norway."

"You stay here all the winter?"

"I think so, if it is not too cold for my friends."

"I never see your friends, Miss Howard."

"Mrs. Shirley has come to that time of life, when she likes best to sit still at home all day. My other friend, as you are aware from your kind inquiries at my house, is too ill at present to leave her room."

Lord Henry looked very melancholy.

"But, though you have not seen *my* friends," continued Regina, "I have been more fortunate with respect to yours. I know Miss Hopper is at Keswick."

"Foolish old woman! I hope you don't suppose she is here on my account."

"I think your society will very much add to the pleasure of her tour. Did you not row her out on the lake yesterday?"

"What, — you saw us?"

"No, — I only conjectured."

"And I assure you, Miss Howard, I was very uncomfortable all the time. I thought we were infringing the proprieties."

"Certainly that was a heart-rending thought to you; but you are going out fishing?"

"Yes; there is said to be a particular kind of trout to be found in the lake. If I am successful, I hope you will allow me to send you some."

"Thank you very much."

She had made four or five attempts to proceed, but Lord Henry was not to be shaken off. He now walked on by her side.

"You once gave me some good advice, Miss Howard, which has not been quite thrown away upon me."

"Could you let me have the date? because such a phenomenon deserves to be recorded. And, though I have no near relations to bequeath it to, society in general would feel an interest in such a remarkable fact."

"Though you laugh, Miss Howard, you are as far as I am from feeling gay."

"I believe so. I have very seldom much inclination to laugh."

"It is about Miss Carleton that I wished to consult you: I have done her a great injury; and yet, as you once told me, I loved her better than any other woman, — more than I then believed."

"Well!" said Regina, dryly.

"There is but one atonement I can offer her for my conduct" —

"You would offer her your hand?"

"I would."

"And you call that an atonement!" cried Regina, flushing with indignation; "you think that would cancel the past! And while she has a roof to shelter her, and a friend to stand between her and the world, do you think she would stoop to *you*, when you come with your tardy reparation, and talk of love and marriage almost on the threshold of her grave?"

"Be merciful, Miss Howard — make allowances" —

"Have I failed in mercy to *her* when the world looked coldly on her? Did I lack allowance for her honest blindness

when she fell into your snares? O Lord Henry! if we are to talk smoothly, let us avoid that topic; let us speak of the weather, or the scenery, and not of the poor girl you have cheated of her life!"

Her companion turned very pale; she stopped short, half vexed at her own vehemence.

"What do you mean about her life?" he asked, after a short pause, during which he seemed to nerve himself to ask, and to hear patiently.

"I mean that her health is quite broken; that she has not the courage left to go on living. Not for love of you, — do not imagine that, — but from sheer pain! A person may bear the torture very well, and die of it afterward; don't you think so? And you don't know, quite, what she has had to bear since she last had the happiness of being in your society."

"And yet you think of wintering in this desolate place?"

"Because she is not consumptive; it was only the other day the doctor said we could not do better than remain in this bracing air. She has not strength, that is all. You may have heard of merchants, suddenly beggared, dying in a week, a few days, — dying in perfect health; and you cannot understand that a woman, — beggared in every hope, in fortune, fame, love, respect, — should lie down and die, only because she has not the heart to live! I must think your imagination very defective."

He kept his face turned toward the lake, looking out through the trees, trying to conceal his emotion. Regina gave him credit, for once, for feelings, because he did not parade them.

"I have been very passionate, and I ought to be sorry," she said at length; "but it was your fault. You would not let me alone; I can be smooth enough you know at other times."

"Don't attempt to defend yourself," he said quickly; "every word you utter is true, alas! but, Miss Howard, I will make amends for all."

"In what way? Your family will never receive her."

"They may do as they please. I suppose you look on yourself as her guardian," he said, with a smile. "I am acting *selon les règles* in applying to you for permission to address Miss Carleton."

"Then, as her guardian, I say that she is not at present in a state of health to receive your proposals," said Regina; but she looked pleased.

"But you will tell her. You must be aware that her illness is only on the mind."

"I think it should be my business to keep her mind quiet," she replied demurely.

"O Miss Howard! you will stand my friend; I am sure you will. I will make her very happy. We will live abroad—I think in Switzerland: it is very cheap at Lausanne."

"And you think Edith will consent to go to Switzerland?"

"Yes, I think so, if you offer no opposition; and you will not. After all, you must be aware that it is better she should marry. You cannot stop people's tongues, and almost everybody has such a keen pleasure in believing the worst. And even *you* cannot say that Miss Carleton did not care for me, once."

"I can say, with a safe conscience, that she would not, had she been a little wiser. I do not feel justified in rejecting your proposal altogether; but I wish I felt sure that Edith was as little disposed to forgive you as I am."

"Ah, Miss Howard! you are not so implacable as you seem. If it were your own case, I know you would be eager to forgive."

"You think so!" she replied. "But you always understood my character so well!"

"I always *admired* it, Miss Howard, at any rate."

"Well, to change the subject, and always in the character of Miss Carleton's guardian, you understand,—I think I

may object to the very marked attentions you are in the habit of paying to a certain lady" —

"Miss Hopper, of course!" he said laughing heartily. "Yes, I think if I never give her stronger cause of jealousy than that! Why, wont you let me have a little fun with Winny Hopper? It is too severe, Miss Howard; now, when I have nothing else to do."

"I wish you would let her alone for another reason," said Regina; "she may have feelings, though she is very ridiculous; she may like you; there is no accounting for tastes; or she may wish to raise herself by marriage; and you give her ample reason to think you are attached to her. Now, I can't see that she deserves to be baffled and cheated by *you*. She has never done *you* any harm."

"Harm! Heaven bless her! no; she has done, or tried to do, me no end of good, on the contrary. But you see, Miss Howard, out of consideration for *her*, I cannot break off our acquaintance just at present. She is converting me; and she does so enjoy it! I have a sweet hymn now in my pocket, — oh, no! I made it up into papelitos; but she gave it me yesterday, and I promised her to get it by heart if she would only sing it to me, and, after coaxing her for half an hour, she did, like a sucking pig! Ah, you cannot help laughing at the thought of Winny's vocal powers."

"If I laugh, — because I know she has no voice at all; a little squeak, as you say, like a sucking pig, — that is no reason why you should make her conspicuous, by rowing her on the lake, as you did yesterday."

"That was, I assure you, merely a scientific excursion. She wished to see the floating island, and she told me all about the gas, and then she gave me a lesson on botany, and we had to go to the head of the lake to find a damp sort of plant, which she assured me was a very fine specimen. She thinks, with some truth, that my education has been rather neglected; although she owns that I draw better than she does."

"And have you been making her any sketches?"

"I just gave her a scrap or two I made at Borrowdale; little scrawls, that I should have thrown away if she had not begged them."

"You correspond, I know; for she told me so."

"One or two foolish letters that I wrote for fun; and partly to learn if she knew anything of Edith."

"It would serve you right, and I should not be astonished, if she were to bring an action against you for breach of promise."

"Oh! I know she could not do that. Are you going home?"

"Yes; I am not comfortable about Edith."

"Was she worse this morning?"

"I don't know; they said not, — only so very weak."

"I cannot help hoping that I — that, in fact — I know, Miss Howard, you will think me very conceited."

"Not more so than usual. Oh! I wish I could jest," and she stopped short.

"Take my arm, and don't hurry. You are nervous to-day, that is all."

"I can walk faster than that. I own I am anxious to be at home; something is happening."

"Why, Miss Howard, I thought you a strong-minded young lady! Your kindness has led you to do too much for your patient. You have shut yourself up till you are ready to start at your own shadow."

"There! do you see?"

"What? good heaven; how catching this fear is!"

"There's Dixon running to meet us, — there through the trees!"

"Some visitor, perhaps, who makes a point of seeing you."

"Well, Dixon!" cried Regina, toiling on to meet him.

"Oh! if you please, ma'am, Mrs. Shirley sent me; Miss Carleton is taken very badly" —

"What did I tell you?" asked Regina. "Good-by!"

"It was soon after you left the house, ma'am, the doctor came," pursued Dixon; "and he thought she was very bad. Mrs. Shirley, she thought (she said) Miss Carleton was having a nice sleep."

"So did I," murmured Regina.

"And Mrs. Shirley, she thought I had better come after you, ma'am," said Dixon; "but she did not know which way you was gone, and I have been all along the banks of the Greta, and then I come on here. You will soon be at home now, ma'am," he added, compassionating her breathless attempts to hasten forward.

A few minutes more, and they reached the garden gate.

The maids were closing the shutters in the front of the house.

"You are too late!" whispered Regina, turning her pallid face to Lord Henry.

He could not answer.

Mrs. Shirley came weeping to the door, and took Regina in her arms.

"My dear! it was very quiet, very peaceful," she sobbed; "we did not quite know when all was over; but it's a grievous thing to see such a young creature die!"

CHAPTER XI.



ORD HENRY insisted on following Edith to the grave; and Regina was not sorry to allow him this privilege, although it placed him, of necessity, on a more intimate footing with herself than she would have otherwise allowed.

He had almost forced his way in daily after the sad event, to inquire after Regina, and to bemoan his own unhappy loss; and he seldom favored her with less

than two hours of his company per diem, talking about himself, crying at intervals, exhibiting a lock of Edith's hair set in a locket, and going into despairing attitudes, so as to fatigue Regina past all endurance.

But the perseverance with which Winny besieged the house, during Lord Henry's visits, knew no bounds. She would hang over the garden gate for half an hour at a time, sending shrill messages to Regina, begging to be admitted to mingle her tears with Miss Howard; she declared that she always had loved that interesting Miss Carleton, and she *did* think it hard, that, as Regina admitted *one* sympathizing friend, she should be excluded.

Lord Henry, whose feelings were very elastic, suggested one morning that snails and other creeping things were sometimes dislodged from garden walls by means of a water engine; but Regina, not being in a laughing mood, thought it better to go out to Miss Hopper, and explained to her that she herself was unfit for society, even of a sympathizing kind; and that the reason why she admitted Lord Henry was, that, under the circumstances, he had almost a right to be received.

As Miss Hopper could not imagine what circumstances she alluded to, Regina informed her that Lord Henry had made Miss Carleton an offer of marriage very shortly before her death; and that it was natural he should have much to say and to arrange respecting the last duties he desired to pay to his affianced wife.

"No!" Winny declared, "there was some mistake. Lord Henry never, *never* loved, never, *never* sought Miss Carleton as his bride!"

Regina said she would not contest the point: her own mind was satisfied, and she could only apologize for not inviting Miss Hopper in, and politely wish her good-morning.

But when the house was again thrown open, and Regina

"there's a worthy soul, close behind him, who will be too happy to bestow upon him all the friendship and affection of which he stands in need."

"That Miss Hopper, my love? I can't tell. I don't wish to be uncharitable, but she does not *look* a very desirable companion."

"I really should not wonder if he were to rush in here, just to beg for shelter," laughed Regina; "and, if he did, I could hardly deny it to a fellow-creature under persecution."

She sat down to her work. Mrs. Shirley went about her household concerns. Presently a ring at the gate convinced her that her prediction was accomplished.

"It is a scandalous thing she wont let the poor man alone!" she thought. "It makes one quite ashamed of one's sex to see a woman at her time of life so very *affectionate*. Is there any age, I wonder, at which ladies are secure from the tender passion?"

She turned to greet Lord Henry as the door opened, and found herself face to face with Alban Willingham.

She had not risen, and she felt it was well, for the room swam round with her. She leaned her head back on her chair, and tried to see and hear clearly. As for speaking, that was not easy at the moment. He came up to her chair and gazed down at her; except that he was very pale, he betrayed no particular emotion, and his voice was colder than ever when he began,—

"Miss Howard, I must ask you to pardon this intrusion."

She made a sign to invite him to be seated, and tried to form the words, but they would not come.

"I could not take this liberty," he continued, "but that, as I am on the point of sailing for India, you are assured against its ever being repeated."

"Wont you be seated?" she asked, under the pressure of a sudden grasp of the heart that flushed her cheeks with pain.

He drew a chair beside her and sat down.

"I have been several weeks in this country," he said, "bent-upon speaking to you a few parting words, and yet unable till to-day, by a mere chance, to come into your presence."

"I am glad to see you," she replied, turning her face toward him, now pale as death.

"And now that I am here," he continued, in a hurried tone, "words fail me altogether. I wished to let you know that I rendered justice to your character and motives; that, while others praise your generosity and greatness of heart, I am silent; not because my homage does not surpass theirs, but because all expression is too weak, and I leave undone the attempt to render my feelings into language."

She made no reply, and let him go on.

"Lord Oswestry, who thinks he knows you better than I do, recommended me to see you before I left, — to assure you, if I could, of what I felt; above all, that I do not regret the loss of this inheritance, which you — Regina — it was a great revenge to give it back to me!"

"You feel, then, I had something to revenge?" said Regina.

"Yes; you may pity me for that. I have begun to think I need your pardon, — to feel that the rejection ought to have come from you. I was too proud to bear it, and so forestalled it, and drew back. I see now that I acted dishonorably. I would lose another Beyminstre to undo the rash decision of a single day."

She roused herself and sat upright, and flashed her eyes upon him. She seemed endowed with tenfold beauty in her scorn.

"And so, when you bade me farewell that day upon the heath, I fancied you cared for *me*!" she exclaimed; "and so, when you intrusted your dying mother to my keeping, you gave over her last hours to one whose heart you did not

read. Did you love *her*? Did you love any one? Is there no living being you can trust? Is not your heart large enough to believe that there are some people who do not put wealth *first* in their daily prayers? So, then, you were to have given *me* Beyminstre, — to have conferred your riches as the best gift you had to bestow upon *me*; and when, by the strange accident of fate, the estate was in *my hands*, you shrank from me as if I had been a leper. Do you think, if I had given you every coin I possessed, I should have weighed it all against one earnest feeling of my heart? You never loved me! I learned that with the first pang that wrung my soul upon your insolent, silent rejection of my love and faith, and all my anguish and abasement was that I could not say as much of you at first, — I have learned to say it since, — I have had time!" and, breathless, red and pale by turns, the fire in her eyes flashing and dying out, she fell back in her cushioned chair, like a Pytho-ness who had "said her say."

"Do not let our last parting be in this spirit," said Alban, after a troubled pause, for such passionate emotion is catching. "I have wronged you very deeply, and wronged myself incalculably more. I came here to entreat your pardon. You are sacred to me, if it were only for your tenderness to my mother, — and you have broken down my pride to the dust. Be at peace with me now, — bid me farewell kindly."

"Well — good-by!" she said, and held out both her hands.

She felt the mist stealing over her eyes, — the deadly faintness that precedes a swoon.

They both stood up.

"One word yet," he said.

She was past tears, — that she felt to be one comfort. She had some idea of trying to get to the window, but everything was indistinct.

"You have my mother's picture, have you not?"

"Yes! would you like to take it with you?"

"No!" he replied quickly.

"Nothing from *me*!" she whispered.

"I merely wished to see it once before I go, that I might take leave of all that has been dear to me together."

"Has been dear!" she thought; "what have I ever done to forfeit his regard?" And she felt strong again, and walked firmly to the table on which stood the carved oak cabinet containing the miniature, and opened the folding-doors of the case. He gave one glance at the face, took her hand again, and was gone before she could speak, before she could think.

She sat down quietly on the sofa, and tried to go over what had passed, what she had said,—what he had replied. She tried to account for the feeling of misery which almost stifled her. She had known all before,—that everything between them was over; that poor Sir Herbert's will was the cause of it, if his change could be ascribed to anything so slight. She knew, too, that he was soon going to India; nothing fresh had happened—why was she so wretched? Had she done anything wrong? She had been angry, but under such strong provocation as would have roused any woman, any worm.

He had come, it is true, to see her, but with what intentions? Simply to take leave, to imply and to say, that he never wanted to see or hear of her again; to pay her a compliment, not wholly undeserved, on her having resigned to him his horrible idol of a Beyminstre; and then to be gone! Not to seek to learn, by any hint or question, whether he might regain his place in her affection. Well; she could be as wise, as indifferent, she could be as careless as himself.

Looking up, she saw the window streaming with one of those sudden showers common to the district, and the thought suddenly touching her of Alban hastening forth from her house in that weather, a feeling she could not control forced

the tears from her eyes in a stormy burst of weeping, that made her glow with shame.

She was roused by the sudden embrace of two little arms, and, looking up, she found herself imprisoned by her little friend, Lord Exmoor.

"O, darling! is it you? — how glad I am!" she cried, kissing him; "and how came you here?"

"Papa and mamma were to pass through Keswick," said the child, "and I would come, too; I longed so much to see you again; and they are at the hotel, and told me to say they would come and take coffee with you, if you pleased."

"I shall be delighted; but you need not go back; that is your servant, I think; I will send a line; and I don't know when I shall let you go again, now I have you," said Regina, holding him close to her with one arm, while she scribbled her note.

"And papa and mamma are going on to see the duchess, I suppose; and my little Exmoor will stay with me while they pay their visit. What a pretty dress he has on!"

"I wish they would never come back, but leave me here always," said the child, laying his head against her cheek; "but, Regina, who has made you cry?"

The best of women will tell stories on certain occasions; Regina did not form the exception to this rule; she answered without hesitation,—

"No one, dear: only sometimes I cannot help thinking of sad things that have happened, and then, like a simpleton, you see how I behave."

"I was very sorry about Miss Carleton," said the little boy; "we have another governess now, — such an ugly one! Her mouth is all on one side."

Regina smiled at Lady Oswestry fulfilling her threat so literally. "But you will be kind, and not troublesome to her, though you don't think her pretty," she said.

"Yes; I behave pretty well to her; but Clara does not.

She draws pictures of her all over her slate, and she whistles while Miss Smith reads the History of England—Clara can whistle just like a boy. When are you coming to Piermont?"

"I told Lady Oswestry I should be glad to come when she is quite alone."

"I hope that will be soon. Is cousin Henry hanging about here?"

Regina felt sure the phrase "hanging about" was not his own. It would not be very pleasant if people were to couple her name with that of Lord Henry.

"Yes, your cousin has been here several weeks. I have often seen him. Perhaps you did not know he wished to marry Miss Carleton?"

"I knew some things; when we were in the study, and he used to come in and ask for writing-paper; but Barker said he only meant to make a fool of her."

"Well, Barker made a mistake," said Regina, smiling; "but now I will show you the little room you shall have upstairs. There, do you not think it pretty? Look out on the mountains; you can see the lake between the trees; we will row there to-morrow, and you shall fish; and we will ride up to Skiddaw together."

"O Regina! and not with cousin Henry?"

"Oh, no; we don't want cousin Henry; you shall be my cavalier."

"How we shall enjoy ourselves! and not cousin Alban?"

"Certainly not; whoever thought of cousin Alban? Now, I am going to show you a very nice old lady, who will be very kind to you while you are here. This is her own sitting-room. Mrs. Shirley, I have brought my little friend, Exmoor, to make friends with you, and he wants some dinner very much."

"Pretty dear! he shall have some cold chicken and some

apricot tart directly. I dare say he is famished after his journey."

And the kind old lady bustled downstairs to hasten the early tea, which was to include the little boy's dinner. The child was so delighted with everything, from the little chintz bedroom down to the apricot tart, that his spirits rose almost wildly. Regina, anxious that no traces of her late emotion should appear, excited him more, in the hope of becoming excited herself; and, when Lord and Lady Oswestry walked up to the villa in the evening, she was dancing across the lawn with Lord Exmoor, teaching him the step of the Cellarius Waltz.

CHAPTER XII.



HE looked more brilliant than ever as she came down to open the gate; her rich hair loosened, and the color deepened on her cheek.

Lord Exmoor would have the first word.

Mamma!" he exclaimed, "I am to stay with Regina; I'm not going on with you to Ellesdon castle; and I have a little room, all to belong to me, and a pony is coming for me to ride."

"Upon my word!" laughed Lady Oswestry. "I was well aware that you had gentlemen visitors already; and now you are going to improve upon that, and take one into your house altogether. But I'll send up his things if you really wish for the child!"

"Of course, you know I do," said Regina, trying not to blush under the insinuation contained in Lady Oswestry's speech.

As they were going into the house, Lord Oswestry said to her, in a low voice, —

“Miss Howard, what have you done with my cousin?”

“I? — nothing,” she returned, more embarrassed than angry.

“He came here — did he not? — to-day” —

“Yes, — to take leave before his voyage. He made a civil speech, too, about the estate. And I own that I spoke my mind to him, — it’s a relief sometimes, — and then he went away. That’s all!” she replied, giving out these fragments one by one, in answer to his look, which seemed still inquiring.

“I had hoped it would not have been all,” he remarked; “I fancied that if you once spoke openly to one another” —

“Oh, we spoke very openly,” said Regina, half-laughing, to drive back her tears.

“Miss Howard!” he said, “I know my cousin’s wishes; you must forgive me if I share his disappointment. I have the regard of a brother for Alban. I think, too, I know the world pretty well; and, if I had a sister or a ward, in whom I felt deep interest,” he added, with his passing smile, “I hardly know another man in whose hands I could safely commit her destiny.”

“You make a great mistake,” she replied, eagerly. “He took pains to let me know that he had no such views or wishes. He was more plain on the subject than was at all courteous or kind! I really had not asked him to marry me that he need have made such a declaration.”

“What are you talking about? — Henry?” inquired Lady Oswestry, who had been taking off her bonnet and settling her ribbons at the glass.

“No,” said Lord Oswestry, “we have not come to him yet.”

Regina could not any longer forbear giving them a slight

sketch of Lord Henry's style when under affliction, imitating Mrs. Shirley, who sat gently laughing behind her coffee-cups, and Lord Henry, alternately, until they none of them could laugh any more.

"But I wanted to tell you about this new man, Sir Ralph Willingham," said Lady Oswestry, as she sipped her coffee. "He is such a wretch, you can't think! Nobody visits him, — oh, no! my dear. Relations? I don't believe he is a relation! Well, to be sure, if the son is, I suppose we cannot quite disown the father. Now, my lord, if you would not mind going back to the King's Arms to smoke your cigar, you could send up this little individual's wardrobe, and the carriage at the same time to convey me back; and, as soon as you are gone, we could enjoy a really nice gossip."

Lord Oswestry laughed at the breadth of the hint, but acquiesced in it, and took a very cordial leave of Miss Howard, asking her at the same time when they were to see her at Piermont.

"When you are quite alone," she replied, with meaning.

"In October, then," he said, replying to her idea.

Meantime Lord Exmoor having fallen asleep with his head on Regina's knees, it was deemed advisable to put him to bed as they best could, and Mrs. Shirley performed this task by investing him with a long-frilled *peignoir* of her own, which he accepted passively, being in a torpid state, and so, was disposed of to his mother's satisfaction.

"I meant to have asked you to take him in," she said. "I had no notion of taking him unasked to the superexcellent duchess. I know she is, my love, kind, — all that is perfect, — and wrote you affectionately on the loss in your house, — well, didn't I?"

"My dear Lady Oswestry, you were both far more kind than I deserved."

"Not a-grain, — you bewitch everybody! Do you know

that even my lord and I have been more — friendly — since you have lived with us? Some people seem to carry a good atmosphere about them. And, as for Exmoor, he actually was planning to run away to find you; only Mr. Best most fortunately met him about two miles from home, and brought him back."

"How frightened you must have been!"

"Oh! just a little pleasing excitement, — life would be too dull without these occasional rubs. But I was going to tell you about Beyminstre. Regina!" she said suddenly, but very softly, "why don't you like Alban Willingham?"

"I can't tell you, — it's too long," answered Regina, her eyes filling with tears; "but I have no mind to be the sport of any man, nor the dupe of any man, more than once in my life; he dares not laugh at me now!"

"My dear child! But why did you give him Beyminstre?"

"Only because I wanted to be rid of it. Fancy a young, single woman shackled with such a property! I have every comfort, — all I can wish for, with my present income. Don't you think I seem very well off here?"

"Everything is charming! — and such a dear old lady for a companion."

"Well, now tell me about Sir Ralph, — that will amuse me."

"Oh! but first I must mention I have seen his beautiful Mexican. My lord and I were going to dine with the Peachells. Sir Ralph and his lady were on horseback, coming down the hill very slow, — we were crawling up, and you know how we *do* crawl on those occasions."

Regina laughed, remembering Lord Oswestry's care of his horses.

"O Regina, she is a beauty! The men say we are envious; but never where the beauty is genuine. We grow angry, I allow, now and then, at their horrible taste."

"It does astonish one sometimes," said Regina.

"She wore a soft gray felt hat, set very forward, and showing behind the splendid rolls of her purple hair — our dark brown hair is merely pretty in comparison. Black eyes, that glowed like lighted coals, and scarlet lips and cheeks relieving the pale olive of her oval face — slight mobile nostrils, and a haughty chin; and she carried her head rather forward, with a reckless, half-defiant look, betwixt an empress and a brigand's wife."

"I hope she domineers over the man who used his wife so ill."

"They say he is her very slave. He never ventures to leave the house without asking leave, and returns to a moment at the hour she appoints. Sometimes she varies the monotony by throwing a plate at his head, or a cup of chocolate; but he bears all meekly, and generally gives her a handsome present after one of their scenes."

"That is just as it should be," said Regina; "and it is to this lady, I suppose, that he will leave his property?"

"No doubt he will, if they agree so long together. Mr. Reynard is constantly at the house, where of course hardly any good company goes. I must tell you, though, that your old admirer, Colonel St. Aix, is very often there. I leave you to judge his motive. Don't be jealous!"

"Sir Ralph is *not* married to her?"

"No — he says he was married once too often: when he has nothing else to do, he swears dreadfully at his son, and vows he shall never inherit a stick of his property — of which resolution you may be sure that Mr. Reynard takes a note. I have no doubt he hates poor Alban, as rogues always hate honest men."

"And when does Mr. Willingham sail?"

"The first week in October. My lord has obtained for him a very good appointment. I wish I could interest you just a little in his fate. I am sure, whatever he did to offend

you, must have been unintentional; for Oswestry says he is desperately in love."

"I will give Lord Oswestry credit for knowing everything but that."

"And how long will you be troubled with the boy?"

"Let me have him, please, till I return to Holmwood."

"How delighted he will be! Only, if he grows too noisy, write me word, and I will send for him. There's the carriage; good-night, *ma toute belle*, and good-by!"

Regina enjoyed this visit of Lord Exmoor quite as much as he did himself. Although only a little boy, he was quite a sufficient escort in her rides, and their ponies were in requisition almost every day. They used to enjoy a row on the lake, these hot August evenings after their early tea, and the moonlight walk home no less, when Exmoor was always remarkably ready for his supper, and as ready afterward to retire to the little chintz bedroom.

But, when the sight-seeing was pretty well exhausted, Regina longed to be quietly settled at Holmwood. There was her home — there ought to be her duties — her poor people — her plans of usefulness carried out.

She parted very sorrowfully from her little friend, Lord Exmoor, who was going at once to Eton, and betook herself, with Mrs. Shirley, to her old house on the common.

One of the many things that surprised Regina, about this time, and she began to think that her life was to be made up of surprises, was a letter she received from Sir Ralph Willingham, informing her that he could not forget it was to her disinterested conduct he owed his present fortune; that he had ascribed to her a motive which, time had proved, was quite opposed to her real one; that the living of Beyminstre, worth eleven hundred a year, was likely to be vacant in the course of a few days; that ladies had always some favorite in the clerical profession, and that it would give

him pleasure if she would nominate the successor of the present incumbent, at her earliest convenience.

Of course she thought directly of Mr. Brand, and even committed the *grave inconvenience* of sending Marianne down to the little front gate to stop him as he was going past, and beg him to walk in for a few minutes; the very thing she allowed, half laughing to herself, that she had so despised Winny Hopper for doing, over and over again.

He came in, and was very much astonished and very much obliged, more so by the truly kind interest Miss Howard took in his prospects, as he told her, than even by a transition to a lot which he could never have expected to fall to his share during his whole life.

To change the subject, Regina asked him where he was going. He replied, looking grave, he was just going to spend a few minutes with poor Miss Hopper; he thought her very low; her spirits were sadly depressed at times.

Regina tried to look as if she believed this; but, not quite succeeding in the right expression, Mr. Brand gently pointed out that people, not altogether agreeable, were yet capable of feeling and suffering very acutely: "Now, to give you an instance of this," he said; "Miss Hopper mentioned to me that she chose the Lakes for her little recent tour, because she had never been there with her *mother*; and, therefore, the place would revive no painful associations."

Regina could not forget that it had been an understood meeting between her and Lord Henry; but, she thought if Miss Hopper chose to put another color on her actions, it was not for her to undeceive their little world; so she merely said, "Really, we cannot be too careful not to form a hasty judgment of people."

But now that Mr. Brand was a rector, and of so good a living, Winny came back to her allegiance, and pursued him everywhere.

She forgot Lord Henry as soon as she was sure he had

forgotten her, and the Church and the Sunday school rose directly in the scale.

She thwarted Regina about some pinafores, and entered into a long correspondence with her on the subject of Chinese tape ; and she had the art of protracting a case that would do honor to a chancery barrister. Indeed, the tape controversy never came to an end ; for, at about the thirteenth bulletin, Regina received her expected summons to Piermont. She knew it would be so ; yet every pulse throbbed as she read the lines, —

“ We have had Alban Willingham here for a few days ; he left us yesterday, and his ship sails this morning. I hate farewells !

“ VIOLET OSWESTRY.”

He was gone, then ! — the letter was dated the first of the month ; this was the second. Mrs. Shirley found her in tears, which she could not readily explain, but said she was worried to death with all this talking about the Chinese tape.

She was received by the Oswestrys with their usual kindness. They were not alone by any means ; for parties of friends were coming and going, and the house was full of gentlemen for the pheasant-shooting, which was just beginning. But Regina knew that she had been understood, and that they had waited for her till the person she dreaded to meet was far away. She often thought over, till she was weary of the words, everything she had said in her last meeting with Alban Willingham. She might have been less angry, and she devoutly wished she had ; but the interview must have ended as it did ; there was not one word from him which gave an opening for a reconciliation. He wished to part in peace, but, no less, *to part* ! Often, when the drawing-room was crowded with groups of people, laugh-

"I did that, Alban, long ago," she said, holding out her hand.

"It need not surprise me," he said, after a pause; "it is nothing strange to find you better, nobler, truer, than I have been. I am a wretch unworthy of pardon!"

"How was it?" asked Regina.

"You did not write, and I fancied, — I hate to go back to the past, — you know when I received dear Mrs. Arnold's letter?"

"But when we met" —

"Oh! what a time of misery that was. How often have I tried to make you speak, if it were only to reproach me! Sometimes, even, I have said things that you might have interpreted as bearing a double meaning; and then I have seen you start, and there has come over your beautiful face a tranquil expression as if you said, 'Patience!'"

"The very word I repeated to myself a hundred times," said Regina.

"When that woman, Hopper, has talked at you, and accused you of craft and meanness, I longed to say to you, I do not believe that; my pride has been injured. I cannot come, a beggar, to sue at the feet of the rich heiress; but I know you are pure as the light of heaven; and I have tried to catch your eye, and express all this in a look. But you have never let me."

"How can you talk so? Why call yourself a beggar?" said Regina. "Is, then, an ancient name, a great descent, become nothing in your eyes? or a high character and standing in the world? If you use such words I shall think you very much gone off," she added, smiling.

"Every thought that you have is high-born," he returned.

"It is very odd; Lord Oswestry once said that to me!" she exclaimed. "But you are so like him; I took you for

ing, talking, singing; sometimes, even when she herself was at the piano, these thoughts would pursue her, and lend a deeper pathos to her voice, a softer expression to her beautiful face. She was more admired than ever; but she had no new lovers, because men seldom love what is spiritual, and never a woman who is quite uninterested in them. It did not amuse Regina to flirt, and Lady Oswestry often bantered her about her coldness, and said she was waiting for Lord Ellesdon's return.

She was laughing at this worn-out supposition one morning, as they were filling the flower-jars together in her own sitting-room, when Lord Oswestry came in to ask his lady some trifling question.

"Invite the Lawlers? certainly, I will; I ought to have thought of them before. You know, my dear, that your constant swain is married?"

"Who is the lady?" asked Regina, hardly looking up from the jar she was adorning with fuchsias.

"One of those sweet girls you met here last year, who used to make hop sacks for poor babies; I don't recollect which. Are you sorry? I remember I was dreadfully shocked when the first man I refused, married. I expected him to turn Carthusian, I suppose. But she does not care! Her thoughts are far away, on the shores of the Nile. Ah, it is a wonderful country, Egypt!"

Regina, who was just speculating as to whether Alban had reached Alexandria, blushed crimson, to her great distress; but, happily, Lady Oswestry had turned to her Davenport, to scribble her invitation, and Lord Oswestry was leaning on the mantelpiece absorbed in his own thoughts.

At last he said gravely, "The plague is in Egypt."

"The plague!" cried Lady Oswestry.

Regina gasped for breath.

"Well, but the plague is always in Egypt," she added.

"Not as it is now," said Lord Oswestry; "it appears in

its worst form every few years, but they have not had it so bad at Cairo for half a century."

"Oh, the poor duchess; she will go wild!" cried Lady Oswestry.

"I confess," remarked Lord Oswestry, "I was thinking of my own concerns. Alban is at Cairo."

"Oh, dear! then you had better write off, and tell him not to be obstinate, but to leave at once. I know he meant to stay a few weeks there, for the sake of learning Arabic."

"The mischief would be done before he could receive a letter," said Lord Oswestry.

"Well, but there's no harm in writing; tell him to go straight on to Jaffa; he will get it in a fortnight."

"A fortnight! the town will be decimated in half that time," said Lord Oswestry, impatiently.

"I'll write myself," she exclaimed; "I'll tell him it is folly to linger in the country under such circumstances."

"I don't believe he cares what becomes of him," said Lord Oswestry, as he left the room.

Lady Oswestry took out a sheet of thin paper, and then, for the first time, looking at Regina, said archly, "Whose fault is that?"

Regina had great self-command; nobody would have guessed all she had been feeling the last few minutes. Nobody could have read in her face that her first wild idea had been to throw herself into the next train, and get somehow, by one swift conveyance or other, to Cairo, to Alban; to get him out of the danger if she could, and, if too late, to claim her privilege to nurse him, to be with him to the last; and then die. She went on selecting her flowers, and clipping the stalks as before; but Lady Oswestry was startled to see the ghastly whiteness of her face; her features sharpened as if by a sudden spasm.

"My dear child! I was only jesting," she cried; "you have nothing to reproach yourself with; I wish I had as little!

But I am sure you would not wish him to be such a heathen as to stay at Cairo now."

"No!" said Regina, just audibly. She still went on altering and arranging her nosegay, as if in a dream. Lady Oswestry sat touching her lips with her agate pen, and looking down on the blank sheet of paper before her.

"Wont you write?" said Regina, at last.

"Oh, true; and the post, — that will be soon going out;" and her ladyship turned and folded her paper, and shook it out, and squared it, and then gazed down upon it as before.

"I don't know how it is, but I never did write to him before, — and I don't know what tone to take," said her ladyship, leaning her head on her hand in a desponding attitude.

"If you catch the post to-day, you will catch the bi-monthly mail," said Regina, in a low, earnest tone, her fingers trembling like Mdle. Rachel's in a storm.

"I know — that's what I was thinking," remarked her ladyship, in a crying tone. "I do wish, Regina, that you would be a really kind friend and write for me; I can't tell *what* to say."

A knock at the door; my lady's own man come to ask for the letters. There were still five minutes to spare.

Regina snatched the pen, and wrote off the following lines, —

"Lady Oswestry bids me write, and gives me no time to think or choose how to address you. She entreats you to leave Cairo at once, and not waste a life which is not yours to throw away. If anything I have ever said or done, helps to make you careless of your present danger, which I do not believe, I wish it undone, unsaid. May God protect you through what we cannot avert!

"REGINA HOWARD."

Lady Oswestry, meantime, had rushed into her lord's study with a face radiant with glee.

"I am a graceless hypocrite!" she exclaimed; "but no matter — I have made her write to him at last!"

CHAPTER XIII.



NOBODY on earth could behave better than Lady Oswestry, when she came back in time to direct the folded epistle, and deliver it to the servant for the post. She was so grateful, so sorry for the trouble, that Regina little suspected how she was triumphing in her heart.

It was settled that she was to remain at Piermont till Christmas. She knew that her society was really valued and that she was in no danger of outstaying her welcome with either the master or the mistress of the house. Often, when they had a crowd of company staying there, Lady Oswestry would come into Regina's dressing-room before dinner, and throwing herself back in an easy-chair, exclaim, "You are the only friend, Regina, I have in the house!"

But, just now, she longed for the quiet of her own home, where she might have been dull and absent and dispirited without exciting any remark.

For it was a weary time of waiting. All she had ever felt for Alban came back now when she knew him to be in danger; she had never loved him so well before! She upbraided herself, constantly, for her coldness when they had been together at Piermont; she recollected a hundred little circumstances which might have led to an explanation, had she chosen to notice them at the time. She did herself injustice; but her heart was softened toward him, as it often does when it is too late.

They were in November. One morning Lady Oswestry was calculating, "He must have received the letter on such a day — if" —

The *if* seemed to send a cold steel through Regina's heart.

Lady Oswestry was making the breakfast, and was finding fault with some arrangement on the sideboard, when her lord entered. They were quite alone. He stood abstractedly on the hearth-rug, without speaking. Regina cast a frightened look at his face. She saw something was the matter; and it seemed as if all her pulses stopped at once.

"Well, good people, when do you mean to begin breakfast?" asked Lady Oswestry, as soon as she had poured out the tea.

Lord Oswestry did not hear her. "A very shocking thing has happened, Violet," he said; "I heard of it only this morning; poor Willingham!"

Regina fell from her chair.

Now if she had, to use an Irish expression, been in possession of her senses when she fainted away, she would have almost died of shame, — she who had disguised her anxiety, her misery, so long and so well, only to betray her feelings like a school-girl at the eleventh hour! But she could control her nerves, her features, everything but her health; and nothing shook her health like a long-protracted suspense.

"Poor child, — don't tell her!" whispered Lady Oswestry, imploringly, as Regina opened her eyes with a dim, vague look around.

"On the contrary, — tell her by all means!" returned her lord. "Why, my dear Miss Howard, you startled us in the midst of my story; the room was too hot; I was just telling Lady Oswestry about our neighbor, Sir Ralph Willingham. It is really a dreadful thing! He was found last night, in his own room, — shot through the heart."

"Sir Ralph Willingham!" cried Lady Oswestry, half

pleased, half indignant ; " what on earth possessed you to begin your story with " Poor Willingham " ?

Regina's pale cheek began to be tinged with carmine ; it was exactly her own thought.

" On my word, you ladies are very unfeeling ! " said Lord Oswestry, lightly. " Here is an unfortunate man found lying on the floor of his room, with a ball through his heart, and you are surprised that I mention him as " Poor Willingham ! " not to count that, on that very evening, he had been deserted by his beautiful Mexican, who had eloped with Colonel St. Aix a few hours previously."

" Oh ! then, that was the cause of his suicide, I conclude ! " remarked Lady Oswestry.

" Most likely," returned her lord. " Of course, the servants say that Colonel St. Aix murdered Sir Ralph, in order to run off with his lady ; and I believe the police are in search of him ; but you know that servants never will accept a simple fact as it stands."

" Well, now — *did* he make a will ? " inquired Lady Oswestry.

" Ah ! that remains to be proved," he replied ; " if he did not, what a capital thing for Alban ! "

" I think the chances are in his favor ; because Mr. Reynard, who was in the house at the time, instantly sent off a despatch for Sir Alban Willingham ; now, I don't think he would have taken that trouble for any one but the heir."

" But all this time, dear child, how do you find yourself ? " asked Lady Oswestry, turning to Regina.

" Quite restored, dear Lady Oswestry ; but indeed the room was very hot."

Regina could scarcely bend her thoughts to anything, — she could only feel. Alban might have Beyminstre at last, if — ; but that if haunted her. Lord Oswestry could not hear any more news from Beyminstre during that day. On the next, the report was that Colonel St. Aix and his com-

panion had been discovered, apprehended, examined, and acquitted, all in a breath, after receiving a very long moral lecture from the magistrate. Lady Oswestry grew impatient.

"If we were to ride over to Bradford, my lord," she said, the next day after luncheon, "we could call upon your solicitors (by accident), and see if we could pick up anything. I hate being in the dark. Old Quillet is an awful gossip; and I will bet you anything I come home as well informed upon the Willingham case as Mr. Reynard himself."

This was agreed to; Lord Oswestry was to accompany his lady, and Regina was desired by her ladyship to keep up her spirits until they came back, which would not be until near dinner-time.

She was never sorry to be left alone. She liked society, and really valued the company of her hostess; but these pauses were almost essential to her life.

She went into Lady Oswestry's morning room, and as the daylight waned, and it became too dusk to read, she sat down to the small cottage piano, and soothed her restless feelings with Mozart's Twelfth Mass. As her fingers wandered into the *Et Incarnatus*, how distinctly there rose before her the little Holmwood drawing-room, with the beautiful Mrs. Willingham singing that movement with herself and Mr. Brand, and her dear grandmother sitting in her fireside chair, listening and approving, and sometimes playing chess with Alban! She rose from the instrument with her face bathed in tears, and sat down on the hearth-rug to warm her hands.

As she sat there, she heard Lord Oswestry's footstep coming upstairs, and presently he entered the room.

"Are you come back?" she asked, looking up. "It is so dark I can hardly see you. But where is my lady?"

"Not come in yet," he said, coming close to her.

"I have not kept a very good fire, but I have been playing till just now," she said, in her unsteady voice, that betrayed recent tears.

He did not answer.

She rose up suddenly, as if moved by a spring, and said, "Lord Oswestry, you have heard bad news ; tell me at once, and then it will be over !"

To her breathless astonishment, she found herself suddenly clasped in the arms of her sober host, while a voice like his exclaimed, "Regina ! do you not know me ?"

"Oh ! Alban, is it you ? — is it you ?" she cried, and, dizzy with the shock, she leaned against him.

"And did you really write me this, Regina ?" he asked, drawing from his bosom a folded paper. "I have been dreaming so these three weeks ; and lived upon the dream."

She took the letter and opened it, and the firelight glimmered through it like a lattice : it had been perforated all over for fumigation.

"I should not wonder ; I dare say I did ; it feels like foreign paper," she replied.

"I thought, if you had cared nothing for me, you would never have written," he said ; "so when it reached me, I started at once for England."

"Oh ! your appointment," said Regina.

"I met the governor at Alexandria, on his road out, and told him I was recalled on urgent private affairs ; he kindly said he would keep my post open for me till Christmas."

She recollected at that moment the dreadful scene that had lately taken place at Beyminstre, and felt that she could not be the one to tell him ; she gave him the letter back, and sat down, sick at heart.

"Yes ; I know it," he said, answering her thought ; "I saw the papers at Southampton ; I was shocked beyond measure ; but I cannot affect any other feeling on the subject. Now, Regina, my prospects are all uncertain ; I may have to return to India ; I may be able to offer you the lot I once hoped would be mine ; but will you take me as I am, with or without Beyminstre ?"

"I did that, Alban, long ago," she said, holding out her hand.

"It need not surprise me," he said, after a pause; "it is nothing strange to find you better, nobler, truer, than I have been. I am a wretch unworthy of pardon!"

"How was it?" asked Regina.

"You did not write, and I fancied, — I hate to go back to the past, — you know when I received dear Mrs. Arnold's letter?"

"But when we met" —

"Oh! what a time of misery that was. How often have I tried to make you speak, if it were only to reproach me! Sometimes, even, I have said things that you might have interpreted as bearing a double meaning; and then I have seen you start, and there has come over your beautiful face a tranquil expression as if you said, "Patience!"

"The very word I repeated to myself a hundred times," said Regina.

"When that woman, Hopper, has talked at you, and accused you of craft and meanness, I longed to say to you, I do not believe that; my pride has been injured. I cannot come, a beggar, to sue at the feet of the rich heiress; but I know you are pure as the light of heaven; and I have tried to catch your eye, and express all this in a look. But you have never let me."

"How can you talk so? Why call yourself a beggar?" said Regina. "Is, then, an ancient name, a great descent, become nothing in your eyes? or a high character and standing in the world? If you use such words I shall think you very much gone off," she added, smiling.

"Every thought that you have is high-born," he returned.

"It is very odd; Lord Oswestry once said that to me!" she exclaimed. "But you are so like him; I took you for

him just now, you know ; and, very often, I used to take him for you."

"Ah," said Alban, — a new light seeming to break in upon him, — "I cannot describe what that man has sometimes made me suffer. I felt so sure that he was gaining an influence over you, unsuspected by yourself."

"I can hardly forgive that," said Regina, smiling. "Really, Lady Oswestry is not a myth, nor the shadow of a shade, that I should forget her existence ; and I had, thank you, been brought up to consider my duty to my neighbor."

The fire had burned so low that they were almost in darkness. She lit the branches on the mantelpiece, and turned half toward him in a posture to delight a sculptor ; the lights behind her giving that dim radiance to her whole outline, which he had associated always with her memory since their moonlight walk.

"O Peri!" he said, advancing to her, "you shall never escape me again."

"There are the Oswestrys!" cried Regina, "*le véritable Amphitrion*, this time."

They came in together, and, for a few minutes, there was nothing but exclamations and inquiries. He could not possibly have heard the news? No, not till he reached England. Dear! Lady Oswestry could not think how it came about ; it never was her little bit of a letter, which she did not even write herself, that had such a powerful effect on his movements, — was it? And Regina, was not she surprised? Fancy her having to stay, poor child, and entertain him, as no doubt she did, from civility, when it must have been the greatest bore in the world to both parties.

She made them all laugh ; and then she became serious, after her fashion.

"Somebody owes me some money ; who is it? I laid a bet this morning that I would get all the information I wanted from Thomas Quillet, Esq., gentleman."

"You laid a bet which nobody took, my dear Violet," said Lord Oswestry, quietly.

"Did I? I'm sorry, because money is always *an object* as Mrs. Chillingworth says. However, Sir Alban, my information concerns you, and I am delighted to be the first to congratulate you upon it. Sir Ralph left no will; and, therefore, Beyminstre is yours."

"And yours!" said Alban, turning to Regina.

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At this moment, Winny Hopper is the most popular person in the County of Kent. Everybody believes in her, except Sir Alban and Lady Willingham. Although Mr. Brand thinks her on the whole a worthy creature, she has lately been rather a thorn in his side. You see he is now very handsomely off, and his rectory, built out of a fragment of the old priory, is one of the lions of the neighborhood. He could keep a carriage if he liked, and there he is, a single man still; such a waste! Winny has several times driven over to church, at Beyminstre, to hear Mr. Brand preach, and cried and smiled like April all the time; because, though the curate of Holmwood is as good a man as ever wore a stole, yet she *can* NOT accustom herself to do without his sermons, she tells Mr. Brand; and so she gets up at six o'clock, and drives in her little chaise all across the country, twenty-eight miles, to hear one of his *beautiful* discourses. It is flattering, and, as Mr. Brand said, what could he do but ask her in to luncheon? Only the last time, as he was showing her his greenhouse, between the services, she really did so very nearly make him an offer, that he grew uncomfortable, and walked across to the House to consult Lady Willingham. Because, he said, though Miss Hopper was not young, people would talk, as he was

a single man, and he had no intention of changing his condition.

Regina was extremely amused ; and desired Mr. Brand to consider himself always invited to luncheon at Beyminstre on Sunday. Then, she said, Miss Hopper will be left to the society of your butler, if she still persists in forcing your doors, and she will soon drop her visits.

Regina has not forgotten Mrs. Shirley, whom she has installed at Beyminstre as housekeeper. The Duchess of Clareville wrote to her very affectionately upon her marriage, and said that, although she would have gladly formed other projects for her young friend's establishment, she had very early learned to lay them aside, for she had long seen how Regina's heart was occupied. The good Winters are always very welcome guests to the Willinghams ; old Mr. Winter sometimes tells Regina, laughing, that "the mischief was done" at his concert years ago ; but he often adds that "if you wish to see a couple really happy themselves, and earnestly desirous to spread happiness around them, you must go and look for them at Beyminstre."

